

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 1, Thunderbolt

The central regions of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts rarely saw humans passing through. Here, magical beasts of the seventh to ninth ranks could appear at any time. Most likely, only warriors of the ninth rank would dare trespass here. But Linley, upon arriving at the central region, began to embark on a northwards journey, along the central lines of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. Such an incredible journey was something which even most combatants of the ninth rank wouldn't be so wild as to attempt.

Linley was only wearing a pair of raggedy hempcloth pants. His upper body was bare, and he was barefooted as well. On his back, he carried the adamantite heavy sword. Step by step, he continued on this path which few dared tread.

As always, Bebe stood on Linley's shoulders, scanning the nearby area.

"Rustle, rustle."

Linley walked through a thick layer of dried leaves, his face calm. His backpack, Bloodviolet, straight chisel, and other clothes were all stored inside the interspatial ring. Within Clayde's interspatial ring, aside from that enormous fortune of 2.2 billion gold coins worth of magicrystal cards, there were also dozens of precious items. Even the least valuable of them was worth millions of gold coins. The wealth accumulated by the royal clan of Fenlai over centuries was indeed a terrifying figure.

But to Linley?

Wealth was merely a worldly possession. What he truly valued was his own strength. Hadn't the Dawson Conglomerate been willing to directly offer him a hundred million gold coins to join them? And this was just based on the mere possibility that Linley would reach the Saint-rank. To truly invite a Saint-rank to join, the price would be astronomical and astonishing.

From this, one could tell how important one's personal strength was.

....

Although Linley was in the core regions, Linley still quite sensibly avoided a region where he couldn't detect any magical beasts for tens of kilometers around. For such a large place within the core regions of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts to be devoid of magical beasts most likely meant that the region was the territory of a Saint-level magical beast. Although Linley was self-confident, he still didn't want to irritate a Saint-level magical beast.

Cutting his way through brambles and thistles, Linley wasn't travelling at a particularly high speed.

"Everything needs to start from the basics." Linley was extremely pragmatic. Every day, he carried the adamantite heavy sword on his back. Slashing, chopping, piercing, upward swinging. Linley continuously practiced with every possible move, trying nonstop to raise his attack power.

Linley didn't train using only one method either.

He would often ponder how to train next. Using the scant information in his clan's records regarding how some of his ancestors had trained, he tried to form a correct training regime for himself.

The correct way of training was to not aim too high and too far right away.

The dawning spring, the flourishing summer, the cool autumn, the freezing winter. No matter what season it was, Linley continued to only wear those tattered pants, which had been ripped countless times due to his Dragonform transformation. His upper body remained bare.

Linley had discovered something...

When he was barefooted, he could more clearly sense the thrumming pulse of the earth. Standing on the ground, his heart was as steady as the vast earth itself. Linley's usage of the adamantine heavy sword also began to embody the weight of the world itself.

His upper body was bare.

Feeling the movement of the air against his body, Linley felt as though his entire being had become part of the wind itself. Wind, by its nature, was invisible and formless. When using the Bloodviolet flexible sword, Linley felt that he was wielding it with greater and greater ease.

Because of this, Linley now emanated an aura that was both stable and immovable as well as graceful as the wind. These two auras should have been opposites, but the strange thing was, coming from Linley, they felt very natural and innate.

.....

Focusing primarily on the heavy sword, secondarily on the flexible sword, and also sparing some time for stonesculpting. At night, Linley would be in the meditative trance. Linley's entire life had entered a very particular regime of training.

Sometimes, when he saw massive waterfalls crashing down from the top of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, Linley would feel excited and leap into the waterfalls, training beneath the water.

Seeing those long, pure rivers, Linley would often wade into their waters.

When he saw boulders atop mountain peaks, if Linley felt struck by inspiration, he would directly climb onto the top of the peaks and carve out a statue, perhaps spending several nights on each one.

.....

He did whatever he wanted.

Linley's mind and spirit were more natural and more at-ease than they ever had been before. Training under these conditions, Linley totally forgot the passage of time. He only felt that his strength was improving every single day, and every single improvement made him feel happy and moved.

The path of training was a long, winding one.

This was a hard road to travel, but on this path there were constant new breakthroughs, making one feel gratified and moved.

.....

Linley began to grow a beard, and his originally short hair began to grow long as well. His eyes, previously filled with a proud aloofness, had become calm and tranquil, due to the influence of being in touch with nature for so long.

Only occasionally while training would his eyes become terrifyingly sharp.

Linley's temperament, as well, had become molded by nature to become more stable. Without Doebling Cowart's guidance, Linley had no one to rely upon. Naturally, he continued to develop and mature even more.

.....

"Rumble."

Water thundered down from the hundred-meter high waterfall, smashing down against the deep pool below, spraying water everywhere. Right next to the waterfall, there was a large boulder sticking up from the ground.

There was a person seated cross legged atop the boulder, with a black heavy sword resting atop his legs.

It was early dawn. The sky was just beginning to lighten. Within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, one of the things Linley enjoyed doing was enjoying the clear dawn air.

"Ah..." Linley opened his eyes.

He glanced behind him, and saw Bebe curled up right next to him. Bebe's two little claws were stuck directly into the stone itself, so as to make sure there was no possibility he could roll off and fall.

"Bebe, time to move." Linley said with a laugh.

Bebe opened his eyes lazily, glancing all around himself. Then he shook his head, clearing it of the last remnants of sleep, and stood up. "Boss. I'm hungry."

"Let's go. We'll eat later." Linley leaped off the boulder. Moving as gracefully as the wind itself, Linley traversed several dozen meters with that leap, landing on the opposite shore of the pond. Also jumping off the boulder, Bebe transformed into a black streak, finally landing next to Linley's feet.

A man and a magical beast once more began their voyage.

But before they had gone too far, Linley's footsteps suddenly halted. Bebe looked questioningly at Linley.

"There's a magical beast nearby." Linley said mentally.

Bebe stared. Bebe could now be considered an early-stage magical beast of the ninth rank. Generally speaking, there were very few magical beasts that could draw near without him sensing it. But this time, he hadn't sensed anything.

With his feet pressed against the earth and his ability to sense the wind, it would be difficult for anything moving nearby to not attract Linley's attention.

"This magical beast's movements are light and graceful. I can't sense its movements on the earth at all. But when it moves, it causes vibrations in the wind." Linley said mentally.

Bebe nodded.

.....

A Golden Tattooed Panther was latched onto a tree trunk, not moving at all. Panthers could be considered one of the fastest type of land-based magical beasts.

In particular, the Saint-level Electrobolt Panther's movement speed made it an incredibly terrifying Saint-level magical beast to deal with.

Golden Tattooed Panthers were magical beasts of the seventh rank. But as a panther-type magical beast, it naturally possessed the high speed which all panthers were known for. Its explosive, short distance pouncing speed was even superior to magical beasts of the eighth rank.

The Golden Tattooed Panther suddenly exerted pressure with its four limbs.

"Swish."

It leapt atop another tree. Panthers were extremely skilled at running and leaping about on tree tops, and were very well known for that as well. From within the dense leaves, the Golden Tattooed Panther had already seen that distant human figure.

The Golden Tattooed Panther waited quietly. Waited for the human to draw near.

Indeed, the human and the black Shadowmouse were beginning to come nearer.

"A black Shadowmouse? Not a threat." Magical beasts of the seventh rank possessed very high intelligence. The primary focus of the Golden Tattooed Panther was that human. The aura that human emitted had already raised the Golden Tattooed Panther's caution level. But the Golden Tattooed Panther had the feeling that this human shouldn't be too powerful.

Indeed, in his base form, Linley was only a late-stage warrior of the seventh rank.

Generally speaking, when a magical beast of the seventh rank fought a human of the seventh rank, the magical beast would have the advantage.

"Swish." Leaping off from the tree trunk, the Golden Tattooed Panther transformed into a vicious golden blur, gracefully soaring towards Linley.

The seemingly totally unprepared human, suddenly....

As fast as lightning, drew that adamantine heavy sword from his back while retreating! At the same time, he chopped down with that sword against the Golden Tattooed Panther with tremendous power.

Already in mid-leap, there was no way for the Golden Tattooed Panther to change its trajectory. The only thing it could do was to do his best to move his head away.

"Bam."

Flashing out like a lightning bolt, the adamantine heavy sword viciously slammed against the Golden Tattooed Panther's body. Where it landed on the Golden Tattooed Panther's body, a deep crevice appeared. The sounds of bones shattering could be heard.

With that 'bam' sound, the Golden Tattooed Panther's body crashed to the ground. It lay twitching there, blood pouring out of its mouth. But within ten seconds, the Golden Tattooed Panther moved no more.

Linley gracefully resheathed his adamantine heavy sword.

"Bebe, our breakfast today will be panther flesh." Linley said casually.

To Linley and Bebe, this was just a very ordinary event. Within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, they would kill several magical beasts every day.

If an expert at using the sword had been present, they would clearly be able to tell that Linley, despite only being a late-stage warrior of the seventh rank, was able to utilize this 3600 pound heavy sword at an extremely high level. Not only did the weight of the heavy sword not hinder Linley, Linley was even able to make use of its weight to make the speed of the heavy sword's blows faster.

When chopping, he could actually chop a magical beast of the seventh rank to death at one blow. This power was simply astonishing.

Linley and Bebe began to roast panther flesh in the middle of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

"Boss, how powerful is the most powerful attack you can now use with that heavy sword? A few days ago, you said you had a breakthrough." Bebe asked.

They had been in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for over a year now. During this year, Linley's mind had become one with nature, and he had completely immersed himself in his training. This year and a half of training had improved his abilities at an extremely rapid pace.

"My most powerful attack? Hard to say. Speaking in more general terms, I should be able to fight most magical beasts of the eighth rank in human form alone." Linley said confidently.

This wasn't arrogance. This was confidence in his own power.

"The panther meat smells so good." Bebe sniffed the air with his nose.

"Hrm?" Linley frowned, then suddenly laughed. "Bebe, when we roast meat, we often attract attention from magical beasts. Only, this time, this magical beast seemed to be quite a slow and clumsy one."

After waiting a good while, Linley and Bebe finally saw a magical beast appear.

A Velocidragon.

"Velocidragon?" Linley began to laugh. Linley was now quite familiar with Velocidragons. Despite being magical beasts of the seventh rank, they possessed extremely powerful defense. Although both were of the seventh rank, a Velocidragon's defense was far more formidable than that of a Golden Tattooed Panther. But in turn, the Golden Tattooed Panther was far faster than a Velocidragon.

"Boss, you say that your attack power is really high now. Do you think you can chop a Velocidragon to death with one sword stroke?" Bebe suddenly said.

The scales of a Velocidragon were nearly half a meter thick, and the bones of its skull were extremely hard and dense. Although Velocidragons were fairly slow, their defense could match an ordinary magical beast of the eighth rank.

"One sword blow? I haven't tested it yet. Let me give it a try."

Linley drew the adamantine heavy sword from the sheath on his back, then began walking step by step towards the Velocidragon.

The Velocidragon was two stories tall and nearly twenty meters long. Compared to this enormous creature, Linley was nothing more than a small speck.

"Groooooowl." The Velocidragon roared angrily at Linley.

But wielding the adamantine heavy sword in his hands, Linley continued to walk towards the Velocidragon, one barefooted step at a time.

Suddenly....

Linley's movements sped up dramatically as he charged towards the Velocidragon. Letting out an angry roar, the Velocidragon sent its draconic tail whipping towards Linley. The Velocidragon's tail was an extremely quick weapon.

"Clang." Linley's adamantine heavy sword suddenly moved at high speed and blocked the draconic tail.

Despite the great lashing force of the Velocidragon's tail, Linley leapt off the ground, borrowing the force of the tail to fly over the Velocidragon.

"Uh, this is a human?" The Velocidragon was surprised to discover that the man in front of him had wielded that adamantine heavy sword as easily and as naturally as the grass bowing from the wind. And now, that man was smashing directly down at his head with the sword.

The Velocidragon was extremely confident. Its skull was, after all, the toughest part of its body.

Indeed...

When that agile, flowing black heavy sword touched his skull, it posed no danger to the Velocidragon at all. But all of a sudden, just as it touched the skull, an incredibly powerful force exploded from the sword. Like a sudden flood bursting through a dam, that astonishing power poured out all at once. It only heard a 'crack' sound, and then everything went dark.

Bebe watched this scene in astonishment.

Linley had only struck the skull, the toughest part of a Velocidragon's body, with a single blow from his sword. And then, the Velocidragon's head had split open like a fragile egg, with brain matter and blood pouring out. The massive, powerful body of the Velocidragon slumped to the ground, as Linley gracefully landed as well.

"Boss! Wow! You are that powerful now?" Bebe ran over excitedly.

Linley laughed. "Over the past year, I have been able to almost perfectly merge my own strength with my Dragonblood battle-qi. And then, based on what I have learned from my connection to the earth, I broke past the simple levels of using 'strength' and 'battle-qi'. I have arrived at the level which the ancestors of the Baruch clan described as 'wielding the heavy as though it were light'. Only now, I have managed to develop this technique: 'Thunderbolt'.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 2, The Howling Worldwolf

The most basic underpinnings of training with the heavy sword lay in combining battle-qi along with physical strength in utilizing it.

Right after the adamantine heavy sword had been forged in the city of Hess, when Linley had used the adamantine heavy sword to attack the violet-robed Special Executors, he was not capable of combining his strength and his battle-qi to use the heavy sword in a meaningful way.

The heavy sword was not meant to be used with pure brute force.

It lay in conserving every little bit of strength to allow the heavy sword to reach its maximum possible velocity, while at the same time combining physical strength and battle-qi to reach the most optimal level possible.

After spending more than a year, Linley had finally become able to wield the adamantine heavy sword as easily as though it were his hands, without wasting any strength at all. Despite a limited amount of strength and battle-qi, he was able to raise the power of the adamantine heavy sword to an extremely high level.

But this was still just the basics.

Above this basic level was the second level, a different realm of possibilities. This was something Linley had suddenly awoken to when he saw the crashing waterfalls within the mountain grotto.

To wield something heavy as though it were light was easy to say, but hard to do.

In truth, it required one to be able to perfectly control one's battle-qi and physical strength. And then, one could suddenly unleash all of one's power, like the unending, cascading waters of the waterfall. The power that erupted from a blow such as this was extremely great.

This was the principle underneath Linley's 'Thunderbolt' technique.

But this was easier said than done. It required an extremely solid grasp of the basics. If one didn't have enough control over one's strength and battle-qi, even after one understood the principles of this technique, one still wouldn't be able to utilize it.

"As powerful as that? Boss, is this the most powerful way to use the heavy sword?" Bebe said in surprise.

Laughing, Linley shook his head. "Not even close. Based on the information contained within my clan's records, the way of using heavy weapons can be described as having three levels. The first is to master and perfect the basics. The second is to be able to wield something heavy as though it were light. And the third is known as 'impose'."

"'Impose'?" Bebe was a bit confused. "What is that?"

"I don't know either." Linley shook his head. "After all, my clan's records, aside from the Secret Dragonblood Manual, primarily consists of general descriptions of the history of my clan and some stories of my ancestors. With regards to that ancestor who was able to 'wield something heavy as though it were

light', there were only a few lines describing his power. That record also mentioned that the third level was 'impose', but what exactly 'impose' is, it didn't describe in detail, so I don't know either."

Linley didn't understand.

Could 'impose' be referring to an imposing manner?

But when wielding the adamantine heavy sword, how much could an imposing manner possibly add to attack power?

"I haven't had that moment of enlightenment yet. No way to understand it." Linley shook his head.

Linley knew very well that he had not yet in fact mastered this level of 'using something heavy as though it were light'. Because the most important part of the 'Thunderbolt' technique was to suddenly release all of the power available at the last moment.

How would one further increase the power of this technique?

Right now, Linley was suddenly releasing all of his strength and battle-qi in a brute force manner, but Linley knew that this was a stupid, crude method.

"Pity that there's no signposts on the path of training." Linley chuckled, then ceased his idle speculations.

.....

Deep autumn. The prime, virgin forests of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts were covered with yellowing leaves.

This was the late autumn of year 10001 of the Yulan calendar. Linley had already entered the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for more than a year and a half, but he had only travelled five or six thousand kilometers thus far.

He spent most of every day in training, progressing only a few dozen kilometers at most in his journey.

Late at night, not a sound could be heard. Within the central areas of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, beneath a giant tree which would take five or six men linking hands to embrace the trunks of, Linley was quietly sitting cross-legged in the meditative trance.

Slowly...

The skies began to brighten. Linley opened his eyes, a hint of a smile on his face.

The light, pure dawn wind was blowing. Several leaves slowly spun about and fell down. Watching these leaves fall, Linley was silent.

"Boss?" Bebe casually opened his eyes. Questioningly, he said, "You woke up? Why didn't you wake me?"

Actually, every day, when Linley woke up, Bebe would wake up as well. But every day, Bebe would wait for Linley to wake him up before he would be willing to open his eyes. Today, though, Linley hadn't called him.

"Bebe, I seem to have made a breakthrough." Linley suddenly said mentally to Bebe.

"A breakthrough?" Bebe immediately jumped to his feet. He asked with excitement, "What sort of breakthrough have you had?"

Linley laughed. “My spiritual energy has finally reached the level of a magus of the eighth rank.”

“A magus of the eighth rank?!” Bebe immediately yelped in surprise.

That winter, when he was sixteen years old, Linley had crafted the sculpture ‘Awakening From the Dream’, and the rapid improvement he had gained over those ten days and ten nights had resulted in Linley’s spiritual energy strengthening tenfold, arriving at the level of spiritual power possessed by a late-stage magus of the seventh rank.

He was sixteen years old that winter, and already at the late-stage seventh rank!

From then until now, three years had passed.

While he had been at Fenlai City, Linley’s spiritual energy hadn’t improved that fast, and based on that rate of improvement, Linley probably would’ve needed five or six years to advance from the late-stage of the seventh rank to the eighth rank. But this year in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, Linley had totally submerged himself into nature, and each time he had engaged in stonesculpting, he had been so natural and unrestrained.

His rate of improvement in spiritual energy was quite noticeable.

Right now...

Linley’s spiritual energy finally reached the eighth rank as a magus.

“Boss, how powerful are spells of the eighth rank?” Bebe said curiously.

“You’ll find out if you are willing to give it a try.” A hint of a smile was on Linley’s face. Bebe stared at him, then said proudly, “Come. I, Bebe, am not afraid of magical beasts of the eighth rank, much less a spell of the eighth rank.”

Linley immediately begin to chant the words to a spell.

Shortly afterwards, a large amount of earth elemental essence began to rapidly solidify and condense near Linley. The mageforce in Linley’s body, as well, was beginning to rouse.

“Whoosh.” A wind suddenly arose in front of Linley, catching and tossing up all the fallen leaves around him. An angry howl could suddenly be heard, as an earth-colored, three-meter tall wolf suddenly appeared in front of Linley. This massive wolf was three meters tall and ten meters long. All the muscles on its body seemed as tough and gnarled as steel, and its four limbs were filled with power.

Earth-style spell of the eighth rank – the Howling Worldwolf!

“Hooooooooowl!”

The Howling Worldwolf let out an enraged snarl, then charged at Bebe, but Bebe only playfully stood there with confidence, staring at the Howling Worldwolf.

“Swish!” Suddenly, an Earthen Spear Array erupted from the ground beneath Bebe.

“Whoah!” Bebe let out a cry of surprise, leaping into the air.

The Earthen Spear Array hadn’t managed to hurt Bebe in the slightest, but at this time, the Howling Worldwolf had arrived next to him. Bebe immediately let out a shrill screech, and his body suddenly enlarged.

“Hooooooooowl!”

Fangs bared and maw bloody, the Howling Worldwolf bit down at Bebe, while Bebe also bit angrily at the Howling Worldwolf. With a ‘crunch’ sound, Bebe ripped apart the throat of the Howling Worldwolf.

But the Howling Worldwolf didn’t seem to be hurt at all as it slashed at Bebe with his fierce claws.

“Whap!”

Bebe was knocked flying, smashing against the ground, creating a minor crater. Bebe immediately crawled out, staring angrily at the Howling Worldwolf. Just then, the Howling Worldwolf had carried a tremendous amount of power in its claws.

“Bebe, this Howling Worldwolf isn’t a magical beast. It’s an earth-element construct, totally composed of mageforce and elemental essence. It has no vital weak points.” Linley’s voice rang out playfully.

Bebe instantly understood.

To a construct created solely from mageforce and elemental essence, whether you bit it on the tail or at the throat, there really was no difference in terms of damage done.

“Shkreeeee!”

Bebe was truly furious now. Transforming into a black blur, he flew at the Howling Worldwolf, which ripped towards Bebe with its fangs. But Bebe dodged its attack, and then raked the Howling Worldwolf with his claws. In the blink of an eye, Bebe had raked the Howling Worldwolf nearly a hundred times, forcibly bringing his opponent to the breaking point.

“Bam!” The Howling Worldwolf’s body suddenly began to grow brighter, and then the blink of an eye, it exploded.

Bebe was knocked flying by the force of the explosion, smashing hard against a nearby tree, snapping the tree in half, then falling to the ground.

“Bebe, what do you think?” Linley knew exactly how powerful Bebe was. This bit of offensive force wasn’t enough to hurt Bebe.

Bebe quickly ran over to him. In a wounded voice, he said, “Boss, that Howling Worldwolf’s offensive attacks weren’t lower than an ordinary magical beast of the eighth rank. And it doesn’t have any weaknesses either. What a freak. Even when it was about to die, it engaged in a suicidal explosion.”

When its body was about to collapse, a construct formed from mageforce and elemental essence would naturally explode.

A dual-element magus of the eighth rank. Now, even in human form, Linley would still be considered a truly formidable person. The power of eighth rank spells was very astonishing.

For example, the ‘Brutal Tornado’ wind-style spell. This Brutal Tornado spell could easily annihilate an army of thousands of soldiers. In truth, even the attack of the Howling Worldwolf would destroy most small armies. The Howling Worldwolf possessed astonishing defensive powers. Only a freak like Bebe would be capable of so easily penetrating the Howling Worldwolf’s defense.

The Howling Worldwolf was extremely fast and possessed astonishing defensive powers. And, it had no weak points.

One could imagine how much havoc it would wreak upon an army.

“To a kingdom, a magus of the eighth rank is more important than an army with 10,000 soldiers.” Linley understood this logic. And magi of the ninth rank, in turn, were more important than an army of 100,000 soldiers. As for Saint-level Grand Magi, they were more important than an army of a million soldiers.

By casting a single forbidden spell, ‘Annihilating Tempest’, an entire army of a million soldiers would instantly be destroyed.

.....

Linley’s elemental essence affinity was exceptional. Naturally, he didn’t need too much time to refine more mageforce. Given the additional support provided by the Straight Chisel School of sculpting, Linley didn’t need to spend too much time training himself as a magus.

And since he could Dragonform now, the speed of his training as a warrior was many times faster than before as well.

.....

His adamantine heavy sword in hand, Linley was walking atop a large mountain. He casually swung and chopped the adamantine heavy sword in every direction. Whap. Slap. Every movement was very natural and graceful.

But whenever the adamantine heavy sword touched any boulders, the boulders would immediately shatter.

Either they would shatter into dozens of pieces, or they would explode, or they would turn to dust...

Linley constantly tested himself and tested out how to have his ‘Thunderbolt’ technique release more power. How to, using the same amount of battle-qi, increase the effectiveness of his attacks.

“Whew.” Sensing that he had used up over half of his Dragonblood battle-qi, Linley immediately sheathed his adamantine heavy blade.

With a flip of his hand, Bloodviolet appeared in his grasp.

Linley immediately began to leap about, the Bloodviolet flexible sword in his hands flashing every which way gracefully. The strength of the Bloodviolet sword lay in its speed and its ability to attack unpredictably.

“Swoosh!”

The Bloodviolet sword slashed in the direction of a small nearby tree. Halfway there, though, Bloodviolet suddenly curved like a serpent, and in a flash, it wrapped itself around the tree. With another violet flash, the tree was cut in half.

With a quiver, the Bloodviolet sword suddenly became straight again.

“Swish.” The Bloodviolet sword stabbed forward. Its sharp edge wreathed with a greenish-black light, the sword easily plunged straight into a nearby stone wall.

“Hrm?”

Linley suddenly frowned, pulling out Bloodviolet. He stared at the Bloodviolet sword suspiciously. “Inside the sword...what in the world...” Just then, Linley had been focusing his spiritual energy on Bloodviolet,

controlling its fluctuations and contortions. As he had done so, he suddenly had discovered an aura that made his heart tremble with fear.

“Can it be that?” Linley’s heart suddenly clenched.

Previously, when he had been in that dangerous situation in the Radiant Temple, the Coiling Dragon ring had emitted a tremendously powerful burst of power. This Bloodviolet flexible sword was also a divine artifact, but it wasn’t as powerful as Linley had thought it would be. Linley had always been wondering if there was some secret contained within this Bloodviolet flexible sword.

Linley immediately focused his spiritual energy inside Bloodviolet, carefully probing it from within.

In the past, Linley also tried to do this before he had reached the eighth rank as a magus, but he hadn’t been able to find anything. But now, he was a magus of the eighth rank.

“Hrm?” Linley’s spiritual energy finally seemed to detect something.

A bloodthirsty, crazed aura suddenly came into contact with Linley’s spiritual energy. Linley suddenly seemed to see a boundless sea of blood. Countless corpses. An endless number of bones.

That crazed, bloodthirsty, violent aura directly invaded Linley’s spiritual energy, and then, as fast as lightning, it began to pervade Linley’s very soul...

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 3, A Slaughter

That endless sea of blood was filled with countless white skeletons, and all sorts of different corpses. Some of the corpses belonged to ten meter tall giants that were covered in scales with two horns sprouting from their heads. Others had white skeletons that glimmered with a faint gold color...

“Ah...”

Linley’s eyes began to turn red, as he suddenly began to emit a terrifying, baleful aura. That baleful aura somehow seemed to take physical form as a faint, bloody mist began to emanate from around Linley’s body. And surrounded by that baleful aura, Linley seemed like he was a fiendish god.

Bebe, not too far away from Linley, naturally could feel that oppressive, baleful aura.

Shocked, all the fur on Bebe’s body stood straight up, and Bebe could clearly feel that all of his muscles were quivering, and his blood was pumping faster. Even his claws were shaking, not entirely under his own control.

Terror.

Terror the likes of which he had never felt before!

“Bo-, Boss, what’s going on?” Bebe said frantically.

Right now, Linley was still in control of himself. Only, after being pervaded by that baleful aura, Linley felt a powerful desire to go out and kill.

“This Bloodviolet is?...” Linley forcibly suppressed his desire to kill, lowering his head to stare at the sword.

“Hiss...” Linley could see that in his hands, Bloodviolet was glowing with a devilish red light that flowed, as though blood was flowing on and through it. The entire Bloodviolet sword was shuddering slightly. Linley could feel the intense desire of Bloodviolet to kill! Kill unceasingly!

But right now, the more strongly Linley tried to suppress the urge to kill, the more powerful that urge grew. Linley’s eyes began to turn more and more red.

“Ah!!!” Linley let out a wild howl.

As though he had transformed into a tornado of movement, Linley ran down the mountain. In his hand, Bloodviolet was flashing everywhere like lightning. Every place Linley passed by, the trees and the stones were all transformed into rubble and debris.

Seeing Linley’s wild charge, Bebe stood where he was hesitantly for a moment. Bebe had truly been terrified by that baleful aura, the likes of which he had never felt before. But for the sake of his Boss...

“Grr!” Bebe ground his teeth, then suddenly flew down the mountain as well.

....

Not too far away from the mountain Linley had been on was a clear pond of water. There was a pack of Goldmane Mastiffs living next to the pond. Goldmane Mastiffs were pack type creatures, unlike the solitary panthers or tigers. Generally speaking, panthers or tigers might band together for major battles, but in their day to day lives, these types of magical beasts would generally live separately. But Goldmane Mastiffs were different.

Goldmane Mastiffs had a strong pack mentality and were adept at teamwork.

Goldmane Mastiffs possessed extremely powerful claws. This pack of Goldmane Mastiffs numbered over a hundred. Although Goldmane Mastiffs were magical beasts of the eighth rank, even your average magical beast of the ninth rank wouldn't dare provoke such a pack. They definitely were a local power to be reckoned with.

Right now...

These Goldmane Mastiffs were either lying in rest next to the pond, or casually strolling about, or perhaps frolicking and swimming in the water. This wasn't yet the time for them to hunt for food, and given their strength, they never feared that they would lack for food.

But many Goldmane Mastiffs suddenly looked cautiously up the mountain. Given their alert senses, they could easily sense that something living was moving towards them at high speed. The Goldmane Mastiffs which had been lying down all stood up, staring coldly at this creature which was moving towards them.

Goldmane Mastiffs were three meters tall and six meters long. Their entire bodies were covered with golden fur, and they seemed lion-like. But their eyes radiated a strange golden glow.

"Grrrrrrrrr." The pack of Goldmane Mastiffs suddenly began to growl.

They finally saw the creature which was provoking them. It was a human wielding a devilish violet sword whose body was wrapped up with a red light. These extremely intelligent Goldmane Mastiffs suddenly felt at ease again. It was just a human. Unless this human was at the Saint-level, he wouldn't be able to do anything to them.

But suddenly...

When the human drew close enough for that red mist to cover them, all of the Goldmane Mastiffs suddenly felt terrified like never before. This terrifying aura was far more powerful than even the aura of a Saint-level magical beast. Under this oppressive, baleful aura, all of the Goldmane Mastiffs felt as though their limbs were no longer under their own control, and one after another knelt down in terror as they lowered their proud heads.

"Blood...blood..."

Linley was doing his best to remain clear-minded, but he could feel the intense desire of Bloodviolet to drink blood. After having roused the baleful aura contained within Bloodviolet, Bloodviolet had to be sated by drinking enough blood.

"Swish!"

Transforming into a violet ray of light, Bloodviolet passed straight through the neck of one of the Goldmane Mastiffs. A meter-high mastiff head flew off.

Linley's speed was simply too fast.

No. Accurately speaking, Bloodviolet's killing speed was too fast. Only after it had chopped through eight Goldmane Mastiffs heads did the first head fly off. And only now did the remaining Goldmane Mastiffs, who had all been kneeling in terror, wake to their senses.

"Hoowwwl!" Nearby, the largest of the Goldmane Mastiffs forced itself to stand up, then raised his head up and began howling angrily. But despite this, its limbs were still trembling, and its eyes were still filled with disbelieving fear.

Their intelligence, however, was very high.

These Goldmane Mastiffs all knew that this human emitting this terrifying aura was going to kill them all. Even though they were terrified, they were still going to resist.

Having drank so much fresh blood, Bloodviolet emitted a joyful sound.

"Die! Die!" The more he killed, the more Linley felt as though the desire to kill was consuming him. Right now, the only desire he had was to kill.

The remaining hundred or so Goldmane Mastiffs didn't dare to directly face Linley. All of them turned tail and ran.

"Swish!" Linley's Bloodviolet sword chopped towards the head of another Goldmane Mastiff.

Knowing that it wasn't going to be able to flee, this Goldmane Mastiff turned back and opened its mouth, biting down at Linley while breathing flames from its mouth. Instinctively, Linley's body became covered by his azure-blackish Dragonblood battle-qi, which protected him and blocked the flame breath of this Goldmane Mastiff.

When the violet sword drew close to the Goldmane Mastiff's head, the Goldmane Mastiff could clearly sense that the baleful aura this violet sword was emitting was now several times stronger than before. This terror, the likes of which it had never felt before, caused its limbs to go soft. Even the energy being generated by the magicite core in its body had come to a halt, and it just stood there, allowing the violet sword to cut its head off.

Surrounded by a baleful aura that had taken physical form, Linley constantly chased after and killed one Goldmane Mastiff after another.

These local tyrants, the Goldmane Mastiffs, were now truly panicked. They had no idea where this fiendish god had come from. That baleful aura was now so strong that even their bodily functions were being affected. Even if they wanted to fight, their bodies were no longer under their total control.

Blood sprayed everywhere.

Hacked limbs and severed heads flew everywhere...

In the blink of an eye, thirty Goldmane Mastiffs had died on the spot.

"Boss, boss!" Bebe called out frantically.

Bebe could sense the state which Linley was currently in. He was terrified that in the future, Linley would have permanently transformed into a constantly slaughtering madman. Slowly, Linley's form slowed its movements.

"Bebe. I'm fine." Linley's voice rang out in Bebe's mind.

Bebe immediately ran over. Bebe could clearly see Linley's bare upper body, his forehead covered in sweat, and that faint layer of red on his skin. Right now, Linley's eyes were closed, and his chest was rising and falling like a blacksmith's bellows.

"Whew..."

Letting out a long breath, Linley finally opened his eyes. Linley's eyes had now returned to their normal clarity.

"Boss, you...what happened to you?" Bebe said worriedly.

With a hint of lingering fear, Linley looked at the Bloodviolet sword in his hands. Right now, Linley was very certain that this Bloodviolet sword had been a slaughterer's sword, and that it had killed an extraordinarily high number of people. Linley even suspected that the endless sea of blood, bones, and corpses that he had sensed earlier had all been the handiwork of Bloodviolet.

But those corpses...Linley didn't even recognize most of them, or what races they belonged to.

"Is there a race of humans with the heads of bulls? Can it be that these are the legendary minotaurs from other planes?" Linley thought to himself questioningly. From his books, Linley had seen references to minotaurs before, but there were no such creatures in the Yulan continent.

But many of the other corpses, Linley had never seen or heard of, even in the books and records he had read.

For example, those massive giant creatures that were ten meters tall, covered with thick black scales, and had two massive horns sprouting from their foreheads. The aura emanating from their corpses alone filled Linley with dread. Linley had the feeling that those massive creatures definitely were not one whit weaker than some of the Saint-level magical beasts he had seen.

But there were innumerable numbers of corpses of those giant creatures!

It was true! Those corpses of creatures which were no weaker than Saint-level magical beasts could be seen everywhere in that boundless sea of blood.

"Who was the previous owner of this Bloodviolet sword? He actually killed this many powerful combatants." Linley was secretly shocked. He was absolutely certain that this sword definitely came from one of the Higher Planes, because the Yulan continent simply never had this many powerful combatants.

As he thought back to how he had originally acquired Bloodviolet, Linley understood something. This Bloodviolet Godsword truly did not originate from the Yulan continent.

With a thought, Linley absorbed Bloodviolet into his interspatial ring.

"Whew. Unless it is absolutely necessary, I definitely cannot activate the baleful aura hidden within this Bloodviolet sword again." Linley had already made up his mind about this.

At this time, Bebe leaped onto Linley's shoulders.

"Boss. What just happened?" Bebe asked.

Linley laughed as he looked at Bebe. "Bebe, do you remember how we discovered that magical formation back when we were in the Foggy Valley? At that time, Grandpa Doehring had said that the mysterious magical formation was even more complicated and mysterious than Saint-level magical formations. And Bloodviolet was used to support that magical formation. At that time, we suspected that Bloodviolet wasn't as simple a sword as it appeared to be. And indeed, that is the case."

Bebe immediately listened alertly.

“This Bloodviolet Godsword most likely has experienced endless amounts of murder and slaughter, and also killed many powerful combatants, including those of the Saint-level, or even higher! And precisely because that is the case, within this Bloodviolet sword there is a terrifyingly powerful baleful aura. Once it has been activated and agitated, even those Goldmane Mastiffs quaked and knelt down in fear. But despite having its positives, it also has its negatives. Once it’s been activated, Bloodviolet absolutely must be fed blood. Otherwise, Bloodviolet will refuse to obey my intentions and won’t obediently go into my interspatial ring.”

Bebe nodded.

“Boss, this Bloodviolet sword really is terrifying. Just then, that baleful aura even made me tremble with fear as well, and my limbs were shaking too. In a situation like that that, even though I’m a magical beast of the ninth rank, I perhaps would’ve only been able to use half of my power.” Bebe said honestly.

As for magical beasts of the eighth rank, when oppressed by that baleful aura, they probably wouldn’t even be able to use a tenth of their power.

When the baleful aura within Bloodviolet was activated, the opponent’s own power would be impacted and drop. If even a magical beast of the ninth rank would be influenced so dramatically, one could easily imagine how useful this sword would prove to be in battle.

“But being possessed by that cruel, vicious, wild, murdering urge really is not a good feeling. Once the baleful aura is activated, I absolutely must kill a large number of living creatures before that wild, cruel, murdering urge is sated.” Linley had just experienced that urge, so he knew full well what it was like.

Unless it was absolutely necessary, it was best not to activate that baleful aura.

“Alright, Bebe. Let’s collect the magicite cores and continue.”

“Magicite cores? Wow, so many.” Bebe excitedly went to collect the magicite cores.

After collecting the cores of those several dozen Goldmane Mastiffs, Linley and Bebe continued on their journey, letting the corpses of the Goldmane Mastiffs remain there. In the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, once dead, even the most powerful of magical beasts would be no more than food for other animals.

Their discovery of this secret contained within Bloodviolet was nothing more but a side event.

Linley continued his lifestyle of training. Every day, he would travel around ten kilometers, with most of his time spent training. As far as how the heavy sword was meant to be used, almost every day, Linley would have a new insight. Linley was totally immersed in that wondrous feeling of training and improving.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 4, The Black Shadow

The first snow of that winter was a major one. Many places in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts were covered with snow as well. Various tracks could be seen clearly, some belonging to humans, and as well as magical beasts of various sizes.

“What a large blizzard.”

Linley still wore only those ragged hempcloth pants, his upper body bare. Although the temperature was so cold that even rapidly flowing water would freeze, Linley didn’t fear it in the slightest.

Barefooted, Linley continued to stride forward.

“Boss, it should almost be the time of the Yulan Festival, right.” Bebe guessed.

After having been in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for so long, Linley didn’t even have a rough idea of what day it was. Although Linley did have a pocket watch, the watch was only capable of keeping simple time, and didn’t track dates.

“Should be around that time.” Linley nodded.

After having been in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for around two years, Linley’s prowess as a warrior had increased at a fairly rapid rate. He was at the peak-stage of the seventh rank now. But in terms of using the heavy sword, his skill in wielding his adamantine heavy sword was immeasurably higher than it was originally. In particular, after becoming a dual-element magus of the eighth rank, when he used his magic and his warrior skills simultaneously, his power was raised to a very high level.

“Hrm?” Bebe and Linley both turned to look back.

Not too far away, two sturdy warriors dressed in leather armor and holding weapons were running frantically, seemingly panic-stricken. Seeing that it was other humans, Linley continued on his path. The Mountain Range of Magical Beasts had a large number of human experts training within it, and in these past two years, Linley had encountered quite a few humans. With respect to the humans in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, Linley had a simple principle – Don’t irritate others.

After all, plenty of people were here with the intention of taking the magicite crystals in other people’s bags for themselves. Because Linley had an interspatial ring, he didn’t have to carry his bag with him. Thus, there were very few people who had the desire to act against Linley.

“Wait, wait!” A frantic shout from behind.

But Linley didn’t pay them any mind at all, continuing to walk forward. Those two people ran quite fast, and they quickly overtook Linley. When they drew near, Linley immediately halted and turned around.

“What do you want?” Linley stared coldly at those two men.

Linley could tell that these two were not weak. However, a human’s level of power was hard to judge at a glance. Linley was fairly cautious in dealing with these two.

“Us?” The two sturdily built men exchanged glances, and then forced out awkward smiles towards Linley. One of them, a one-eyed bald man, said apologetically, “We don’t have any bad intentions. Only, the core regions of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts are too dangerous. We two brothers...would like to travel with you, friend. That way, we can help each other out. Wouldn’t that be safer?”

The other bald man started momentarily, then quickly nodded repeatedly. “Right. The core region is very dangerous. If we travel together, we can help each other out. How about this? Once we all leave the core regions and leave the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, we’ll go our own ways.”

“Not interested.”

Linley frowned. Turning back, he continued on his journey forward.

Linley wasn’t that easily fooled youngster of the past. He could tell that these two were clearly lying. Helping each other out in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts? What a joke. These two people definitely didn’t have any good intentions in wanting to travel with him. Linley didn’t want to cause any trouble, and couldn’t be bothered to kill these two either. Naturally, he wouldn’t want them to travel with him.

Seeing how bluntly Linley refused and continued on his journey, these two bald men glanced at each other. Hesitating only slightly, they immediately rushed over again.

“Wait, friend, please wait.” The two bald men caught up again.

Linley couldn’t help but frown as he turned his head to stare coldly at these two.

The two men looked awkwardly at Linley. The one-eyed man said apologetically, “I’m so very sorry, but we two really would like to travel alongside you. Don’t worry, once we leave this place, we’ll definitely show gratitude to you.”

Linley glanced at each man.

“If you want to follow, then follow.” Linley said calmly.

After having been in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for so long, Linley was quite experienced now. If these two insisted on travelling with him, then let them. Linley was confident in his own ability to deal with them. After all, Linley had Bebe with him as well, on his shoulders.

“Thank you, thank you.” Those two bald men said gratefully.

Immediately, those two moved together to walk alongside Linley. At the same time, they constantly scanned the area around them, a hint of dread in their eyes.

“Friend, we hail from the O’Brien Empire’s southwest district administrative province. Where are you from?” The one-eyed bald man seemed to want to have more friendly relations with Linley.

Linley’s eyebrows twitched.

The O’Brien Empire?

Linley knew very well that if he were to cut directly through the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, he would be able to arrive in the territory of the O’Brien Empire quite quickly.

“Why so many questions?” Linley glanced at the man. “If you want to follow, then follow. Don’t make a sound.”

“Alright, alright.” The one-eyed bald man nodded repeatedly.

They could tell that Linley definitely was no ordinary person. It wasn't too strange for him to be only wearing hempcloth pants in the winter, but what was quite amazing was that a human in the core region of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts could be so calm and unhurried.

It was as though this dangerous region was nothing more than a flower garden to him.

“Big brother.” The bald man pulled at the arm of the other, one-eyed bald man. In a low voice, he said, “Big brother, do you think we'll be able to preserve our lives?”

The one-eyed bald man looked at their surroundings in fear, then said in a low voice, “Don't over-think things. For now, let's follow this mysterious fellow. If we follow him, we might have a chance.”

“Right.” The first bald man nodded. But in his heart, he still felt fearful.

Up ahead in front of them, Linley was walking very naturally. Linley noticed that the two men behind him were whispering, but Linley had a feeling that these two men were not the type to try and act against him.

After a while, Linley took a rest.

Each day, Linley would only travel ten kilometers. The rest of his time was spent in training. The two men behind him became truly frantic when Linley rested so soon.

“Why have you stopped?” The one-eyed bald man said frantically.

“Hrm?” Linley glanced unhappily at the two men.

The younger man hurriedly laughed. “Milord, this is still the core regions. Wouldn't it be better for us to hurry out of the core regions before resting?”

Linley frowned, then spoke. “Don't annoy me. If you want to follow me, then follow. If you want to go, then go. As for me, if I want to stop, I'll stop. If you keep kicking up such a fuss, then don't blame me if I kill you both.”

The two bald men exchanged glances, then laughed awkwardly.

“Sorry, sorry.”

The two immediately retreated slightly, no longer daring to disturb Linley.

“These two are acting in a strange way.” Linley glanced at these two men. These two men said that they wanted to leave the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, but they insisted on following him. If he didn't leave, they wouldn't leave either.

Why did they insist on following him?

He didn't know these two men at all.

Linley sat down cross-legged, placing the adamantite heavy sword across his legs. But just at this moment, Linley suddenly felt a tinge of fear in his heart....

“Swish!”

Linley suddenly turned his head. A black shadow suddenly flashed in front of him, then disappeared.

“Ah! Ah!” From far away, a terrified cry could be heard, but after two or three cries, it fell silent. Only now did Linley realize that of the two bald men, only one was left now. The one remaining was the one-eyed bald man. As for his younger brother, the man was gone now. Next to the man, there was a pool of blood.

“Ah! Ah! No, no!” The one-eyed bald man seemed to have suffered some sort of unspeakable shock, as he began to scream.

Linley solemnly rose to his feet, and Bebe began to grow cautious as well.

“Boss, that creature is extremely fast!” Bebe mentally spoke solemnly. “We’ve been in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for a very long time. This is the fastest creature we’ve encountered yet. I couldn’t even clearly see if it was a man or a magical beast.”

Linley hadn’t been able to see it clearly either.

That creature’s speed was simply too fast. In terms of movement speed, it was even a bit faster than Bebe.

“What exactly was that? Bebe has entered the ninth rank now, and we have spent quite some time here in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. But in terms of speed, we’ve never met anything that was faster than Bebe.” Linley began to feel suspicious.

Bebe’s speed was his greatest strength.

It was hard to find a magical beast able to outspeed Bebe, even amongst the ninth rank.

“What was that strange creature? Could it have been a Saint-level creature?” Linley felt a slight shock. Saint-level magical beasts would naturally be fast. It would make sense for it to be faster than Linley.

Linley immediately turned his head to stare at the one-eyed bald man.

Right now, the eyes of the one-eyed bald man were filled with fear, and his mouth was continuously muttering something. Every so often, he would look around in fear, as though in terror of being attacked again.

“Ah!!!” Feeling himself being grabbed, the one-eyed bald man couldn’t help but scream in terror.

But when he came to his senses and looked behind himself, he saw that it was Linley who had grabbed him by his clothes.

“Speak. What is going on.” Linley stared at him accusingly. “Otherwise, I’ll abandon you here and travel by myself.”

“No, no, don’t abandon me.” The one-eyed bald man directly fell to his knees. “I’ll talk. I’ll talk.”

Seeing this, Linley couldn’t help but frown.

He had heard long ago that the O’Brien Empire was a major military power. The people of the O’Brien Empire deeply venerated the War God, and thus many of the citizens of the Empire would train in the path of the warrior. Powerful warriors were extremely proud. For this bald man to be able to enter the core region of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, he clearly wasn’t weak either. Even if he wasn’t a warrior of the seventh rank, he must be a warrior of the sixth rank at least.

But the one-eyed bald man had just fallen to his knees, showing no spine at all.

“Milord, you don’t know how terrible these recent days have been. They’ve, they’ve been like a terrible, terrible dream.” The one-eyed bald man’s eyes were beginning to fill with tears.

Linley immediately began to listen closely.

“This time, myself, my younger brother, my wife, and a group of friends formed a squad to enter the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and begin our training. We hoped to acquire some magicite cores as well. To people like us, who had entered the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts for more than five times, this was an ordinary trip. But we didn’t expect...”

The bald man’s entire body was trembling. “On the third day after we entered the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, just as we entered the inner regions, we entered a nightmare.”

“This squad of mine had six warriors of the seventh rank, and two magi of the sixth rank. As long as we stayed within the inner regions of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, there shouldn’t have been any danger. But who would’ve thought...that we would encounter a terrifying monster.”

“Monster?” Linley frowned.

“The first time we encountered it, it immediately ambushed us, killing one of my good friends, just like how it acted just now.” The one-eyed bald man’s entire body was shaking. “I was furious, because this monster was simply too fast. We couldn’t even tell what it looked like. Only after hearing our friend’s miserable cries did we know that we were under attack. And then, seeing the blood on the ground, we realized that our friend was most likely dead.”

“At the time, we all believed that magical beast was only able to attack from ambush, and didn’t dare to face us directly. Clearly, it wasn’t that strong. In our fury, we even thought about killing it to gain vengeance. But at first, we couldn’t find the monster.”

The one-eyed bald man took a deep breath, calming his agitated heart before continuing. “But that very night, shortly after we finished dinner, the monster came again.” As he spoke, the lone eye of the man opened wide. Clearly he was very nervous.

“This time, like the previous time, that monster ambushed and carried off one of our magi. But this time, it carried the magus only a few dozen meters away before beginning to eat him. Right in front of us, the monster began eating our squad’s magus.”

“What did this monster look like?” Linley immediately asked.

“It looked like a panther whose body was almost totally pitch black.” The one-eyed bald man said.

“Totally pitch black body? The eighth ranked magical beast, Blackstripe Panther?” But saying this, Linley found that he didn’t believe it. A magical beast of the eighth rank couldn’t possibly reach such an astonishing speed. Not even a panther, a land-based magical beast of incredible speed.

“It wasn’t a Blackstripe Panther. Our squad was fairly experienced, and we know that Blackstripe Panthers are covered in extremely dense straight black stripes, while this monster’s body was covered in curved black stripes that looked like a decorative pattern.”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 5, The Mysterious Black Panther

Linley was beginning to frown.

He, too, had never heard of such a creature. There were several types of panther-type magical beasts, but one which was entirely pitch-black and covered with dense black wavy lines which formed decorative patterns, was totally unheard of.

Generally speaking, creatures that one had never heard of must not be underestimated.

The one-eyed bald man said, “That monster decided to eat the meat on the face and the legs of our magus right in front of us, one large bite at a time. Watching this, we were all furious, and we instantly charged forward to attack it.

“However...”

The bald man shook his head. “What we didn’t expect was that the monster was far too powerful. We originally thought that the reason it attacked from ambush, then slipped away was because it was weak. However...when our entire group attacked it, it only heavily wounded us.”

“Heavily wounded?” Linley questioned suspiciously.

“Right.” The one-eyed bald man said in fear and anger. “That monster definitely was capable of killing us all, but it didn’t. It only heavily wounded us.

“We originally thought that we still had a chance of living, only to find that the monster was focused on us now. Each day, it would take away two of our people. Sometimes, it would take them away, while other times, it would just eat our friends not too far away from us.”

Linley’s heart trembled.

He knew that magical beasts were highly intelligent. The magical beast that this one-eyed bald man had encountered clearly was extremely powerful and extremely intelligent. Most likely, this magical beast was a perverted creature.

“We wanted to flee back, but each time we tried to head away from and out of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, that monster would come again and heavily injure us again.”

That one-eyed bald man laughed bitterly. “We simply weren’t able to escape the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. Each day, that monster would come and take away one or two people. In the blink of an eye, our twelve person squad only had six left.”

“Having already seen this happen several times, my wife finally broke down mentally when the monster once again began to eat our friends in front of us. She begged me. Begged me to kill her.”

The one-eyed bald man laughed bitterly. “You have no idea the terror we felt after those three days. All of us were at the point of collapse. My wife was fairly weak, even weaker than me. Faced with this terrible choice, in the end, I finally made the choice to put my wife out of her misery.”

“You killed your wife?” Linley frowned.

“Yes. I killed her with my own hands.” The one-eyed bald man said painfully. “But the very day I killed my wife, we encountered several other people, one of whom was a major figure in our Southwest Administrative Province. A combatant of the ninth rank named Pruitt [Pu’lu’tē].”

“We had been at the brink of despair and collapse. I killed my own wife, but right afterwards, a combatant of the ninth rank appeared. How do you think I felt?”

The one-eyed bald man’s entire body was shaking. “I almost went mad. Truly. I almost killed myself, I was in such pain.”

Linley could totally imagine how, when overcome by despair and mentally broken down, one would personally kill one’s wife, so as to not allow one’s wife to suffer the fate of being eaten alive, one bite at a time. But then, after killing one’s wife, a combatant of the ninth rank appeared?

This sort of contrast was definitely capable of driving someone insane.

“I was filled with pain, but my other friends were very happy, because they knew that we now had a chance. A combatant of the ninth rank! That was someone whom only the Saint-level would surpass. We told our story to him, and Lord Pruitt immediately promised to dispose of this beast for us.”

“When that monster once more came for us, Lord Pruitt immediately made his move.” A strange expression was on the face of that one-eyed bald man. “Just one blow. The monster took a blow from Lord Pruitt head on, then smashed Lord Pruitt’s head open with a blow from its paws.”

Linley’s heart shook.

It was actually able to take a blow from a combatant of the ninth rank head on? Its speed and defense were both incredibly terrifying. A monster like this definitely couldn’t be underestimated.

“This time, the monster was extremely excited. Right before our very eyes, it suddenly transformed, increasing in size from two meters tall to nearly five meters tall and ten meters long. It devoured Lord Pruitt with one gulp.” The one-eyed bald man said in terror.

The look on Linley’s face changed.

“Able to change its size?” Linley was truly shocked.

All Saint-level magical beasts were capable of changing their size. They could easily make themselves much larger or much smaller. But of course, a very small number of magical beasts of the ninth rank with extremely high natural talent could do this as well.

For example, Bebe was capable of changing his size slightly.

In other words...

This magical beast was either a Saint-level magical beast, or an extremely talented magical beast of the ninth rank.

“It wouldn’t be a Saint-level, would it?” Linley’s heart was somewhat unsettled. Although Linley was very self-confident, he still didn’t have any hopes of dealing with a Saint-level magical beast at all.

That one-eyed bald man laughed painfully. “Just like that, the monster continued to torment us, eating two of us each day. In the end, only my younger brother and I were left. We continued to flee along the core

regions, hoping in vain that this monster would engage in battle with some other powerful magical beast, giving us a chance to flee. But clearly, no magical beasts were capable of stopping that monster.”

Linley nodded.

He now totally understood.

But this one-eyed bald man didn't have any good intentions towards Linley, insisting on following Linley. Clearly, this was out of the hopes that Linley would protect him. Acting like this showed that this man didn't care about whether Linley lived or died at all.

The expression on Linley's face grew hard.

“Milord, I...I had no other choices.” The one-eyed bald man knew what Linley was thinking. He hurriedly said, “I have kids. My second brother had kids as well. We didn't want to die.”

“Do you think I want to die?” Linley said coldly.

Just based on what that one-eyed bald man had said, Linley had a general sense of how powerful this monster was.

It was faster than Bebe, and wasn't hurt from a sword blow from a combatant of the ninth rank.

Just based on these two points, Linley couldn't help but feel nervous. What's more, that was only the power that had been revealed. What was the true level of power possessed by this monster?

Was it a Saint-level magical beast?

Linley couldn't be certain. If it was a Saint-level of magical beast, then even if he and Bebe joined forces, they still wouldn't be a match at all.

“You didn't want to die, so you pulled us under water as well?” Linley felt extremely dissatisfied.

“Bebe, let's go.”

Linley immediately sped up his footsteps, heading forward. The one-eyed bald man continued to follow Linley. Linley couldn't help but turn his head and stare at him coldly.

This bastard was still following?

Clearly, that monster had its mind set on that one-eyed bald man.

“Milord, you...please save me.” The one-eyed bald man's eyes were filled with a beseeching look.

But his actions only made Linley dislike him more and more. This man was selfish, only caring about himself. He didn't care about others at all.

“Even a ninth rank combatant died. Do you think I'm a Saint-level combatant?” Linley suddenly drew the adamantine heavy sword from his back, and the one-eyed bald man was frightened into beating a hasty retreat.

“If you continue to follow me, then don't blame me for being merciless to you.” Linley said coldly.

Linley was now a peak-stage warrior of the seventh rank, and a middle-stage warrior of the ninth rank in Dragonform. Although he was somewhat more powerful than when he was in Hess City, in Hess City, Linley was only capable of fighting that warrior of the ninth rank, Kaiser, to a draw.

Right now, it would be very difficult for Linley to be able to kill a combatant of the ninth rank in one blow.

But that monster had easily done just that, killing a ninth ranked combatant.

Risking his own life for a person he didn't even know? Was that worth it?

Linley returned his adamantine heavy sword to its sheath, then left by himself. The one-eyed bald man just stood there, not daring to follow. He only stared with despair and hatred at Linley's back.

“Ah!!!”

After walking less than a hundred meters, an agonized scream came from behind him. Linley immediately turned to look back.

On the snow ground, there was a black panther that was two meters tall and nearly four meters long. The black panther had, in its maws, the body of that one-eyed bald man.

“Save...save me!” The one-eyed bald man was still alive.

Linley's attention was totally focused on the black panther. The black panther's body was covered with a large number of wavy, patterned lines. It was quite beautiful, actually. And right now, that black panther's cold eyes were currently looking at Linley with curiosity.

Clearly...

The black panther was playing a game. The previous game had just come to an end, and now, Linley had become the next victim in its game.

“Save me!” The one-eyed bald man stared at Linley, begging Linley with his eyes.

But that black panther just bit down viciously. With a crunching sound, half of the one-eyed bald man's waist was bitten off, and his intestines began to slide out. The one-eyed bald man spasmed on the ground a few times, not dying right away.

The black panther walked forward gracefully, stepping on the one-eyed bald man's chest with its sharp paws.

“CRUNCH!”

The one-eyed bald man's chest caved in, and seconds later he stopped moving.

The black panther looked at Linley with interest, and then it began to slowly, gracefully move towards Linley. It must be said that its graceful stride was indeed quite beautiful to behold.

“Bebe. Prepare to ambush him. This time, we're going all out.” Linley could tell that this unidentifiable panther-type magical beast now had its eyes set on him. Instead of allowing this creature to ambush him as it pleased, it was better to engage it head on.

Linley drew the adamantine heavy sword from its sheath, staring at the black panther.

“Hmph.” Linley’s body began to transform. Cold, sharp horns erupted from his forehead, while black scales quickly covered his entire body. That sturdy tail erupted from behind him as well, and his knees, elbows, and spine became lined with sharp spikes.

In the blink of an eye, Linley had totally Dragonformed.

The black panther, seeing this human suddenly transform into a strange, human-shaped aberration, couldn’t help but be startled. Its sleek, glossy hair immediately rose up in caution.

One was a Dragonblood Warrior.

The other, a mysterious panther-type magical beast.

“Come.” Wielding the adamantine heavy sword in his hands, Linley didn’t move at all, just standing there on the snowy ground. As stable and unmoving as a mountain.

The black panther’s body began to crouch down slightly. It was gathering its power!

“Whoosh!”

His dark golden eyes locked onto the black panther, this time Linley was just barely able to see the black panther’s movements. In the blink of an eye, the black panther had crossed the hundred meters distance between them and arrived in front of him.

“WHAP!”

Moving as fast as lightning, Linley’s draconic tail swung at the black panther’s body. In terms of speed, the attack speed of Linley’s tail was actually much faster than the black panther’s movement speed.

The black panther was knocked back over ten meters onto the snowy ground.

But immediately upon landing, the black panther let out a deep growl as it stared at Linley with its cold eyes. This time, the creature was clearly going to attack at full power. With a leap, the black panther charged at incredible speed, so fast as to make one’s heart tremble.

Linley could clearly tell that there wasn’t a single hint of blood on the black panther’s body.

The draconic tail of a middle-stage Dragonblood Warrior of the ninth rank wasn’t able to injure it at all.

The adamantine heavy sword of Linley swung downwards, chopping as fast as lightning. Black light seemed to flow off the blade of the adamantine heavy sword. The black panther actually dared to swing a paw to directly claw at Linley’s adamantine heavy sword.

“CLANG!” Linley’s adamantine heavy sword was actually deflected to the side by the black panther’s paw.

“Slash!”

The other paw slashed against Linley’s arm. On the black scales covering Linley’s arm, a rather deep scratch could be seen, and two scales had been split open as well.

The man and the magical beast had each exchanged a blow. They immediately separated.

“Growl...growl...” Standing in the middle of the snow, the black panther stared coldly at Linley. He now saw Linley as a serious opponent. Just now, his attack hadn’t been able to totally rip apart that scaled defense and tear off Linley’s arm. This made the black panther very surprised.

Linley stared at the damage done to his scaly armor.

Most magical beasts of the ninth rank were not capable of breaching Linley's defense. But just now, that panther had been able to rip two scales apart.

The black panther's body suddenly increased in size, transforming from two meters tall to five, and lengthening to ten meters as well. That black tail of the panther was waving around like a whip. The panther continued to stare coldly at Linley.

“Growl...”

This enormous creature once again charged towards Linley.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 6, Another Transformation

“Boss.” Bebe’s voice rang out in Linley’s mind.

Holding the adamantine heavy sword with one hand, Linley leapt backwards in an arcing dodging pattern. At the same time, he mentally said, “Bebe, don’t panic. Let me first have a good fight with this mysterious black panther. If I can’t beat it, you can make your move against it. You are my secret weapon.”

Bebe, understanding, rapidly retreated to one side.

Right now, Linley had been filled with a growing urge to do battle. Despite having spent this much time in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, he hadn’t yet encountered an opponent who required him to truly use all of his power. Saint-level beasts were too powerful, while Linley could now totally dominate ordinary magical beasts of the ninth rank through his higher speed.

Only, this mysterious black panther was even faster than Linley.

“Growl!” The enormous black panther landed on the ground, cold gaze fixed upon Linley.

But Linley only had a hint of a smile on his lips.

“It increased in size, but no doubt its speed is now slower.” Linley could clearly tell that this black panther’s speed had dropped by 20% to 30% just now. With the support of the wind-style Supersonic spell, Linley was totally confident in his ability to deal with it.

But Linley also understood something.

With greater size came lesser speed...but most likely, the black panther’s offensive abilities had just greatly increased. Even in its normal form, the black panther had been able to rip open two of Linley’s scales. Linley no longer dared to allow the black panther to land any more claw attacks against him.

With a ‘swish’, that mysterious black panther once more pounced towards Linley at high speed, arriving in front of Linley in mere moments.

“Whoosh.”

Right at this moment, Linley suddenly slid down on the snow beneath the black panther, passing below it while simultaneously stabbing at the black panther’s chest with his adamantine heavy sword.

“CLANG!”

Linley’s heavy sword once again slammed against the sharp claws of the panther. Although the black panther’s speed had decreased with its increased size, the attack speed of its paw strikes was still astonishingly fast.

“Swish!” That seven or eight meter long black panther tail ripped through the air, viciously slashing towards Linley.

Linley kicked off powerfully against the ground with his right foot, launching himself towards an enormous nearby tree. As he arrived, Linley kicked viciously against the massive tree with both legs.

“CRACK!” The tree was broken in half and fell down, while its dense array of branches also smashed everywhere.

With astonishing speed, Linley used the bounce-back force to dive back towards the mysterious black panther, while at the same time, gripping the adamantine heavy sword with both hands in a vicious downward stroke against the black panther.

“Slash!” The adamantine heavy sword moved so fast that it ripped through the air, creating an ear-piercing, howling sound.

But right at this moment, the black panther turned its head to stare at Linley, staying there without moving, allowing Linley to strike it at will. Clearly, this black panther understood that after having transformed to a larger size, it would no longer be able to rely on its speed to suppress Linley.

“Swish!”

The adamantine heavy sword in Linley’s hands suddenly seemed to lose all weight and force, floating gracefully downwards at an astonishing speed. The tip of the sword, however, was beginning to tremble.

“Bam.” The adamantine heavy sword collided against the black panther’s body.

A look of surprise appeared in the cold, arrogant eyes of the black panther, because this sword blow seemed to have no force behind it at all. Without hesitating in the slightest, it sent its seven or eight meter long tail slashing fiercely towards Linley.

“Thunderbolt.” Linley’s formerly calm eyes suddenly seemed to spit lightning bolts.

The black panther suddenly felt as though that adamantine heavy sword which had just touched its back suddenly exploded with a terrifyingly powerful blast of force. The force was like the eruption of a volcano, blasting out power wildly and at high speed.

“BAM!”

The black panther felt its limbs grow soft, and its body was pressed down by a significant amount. Its glossy black fur suddenly began to ripple like the waves of the sea.

“Growl!!!!” A small amount of blood leaked out from the corner of the black panther’s mouth.

This level of ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’ required perfect coordination between physical strength and battle-qi. It wasn’t just raw, brute force; rather, it was concentrating all of the rushing power and unleashing it at one blow. Although the black panther possessed astonishing defensive capabilities, with its fur neutralizing more than half of the offensive power, a significant amount of power still entered its body, causing the black panther some internal injuries.

“Whap!”

That whip-like black tail of the black panther landed viciously on Linley’s body, smashing apart the armored scales on Linley’s waist and sending Linley flying.

Just as Linley was about to smash into the top part of the trunk of another large tree, Linley suddenly stretched out his right hand and plunged his claws into the tree trunk like a grappling hook. Hanging onto the trunk, Linley looked down from his position at the upper trunk of the tree.

“As I thought. Once it transforms to a large size, its offensive power increases greatly.” Linley looked at the shattered scales on his waist and the fresh blood leaking from beneath it. He now understood much more about this mysterious black panther. “As for its defense, however, it didn’t increase that much.”

When it transformed to a larger size, the black panther’s defense didn’t change much. Its speed dropped, and its attack power increased.

“It seems as though my ‘Thunderbolt’ technique is still effective against it.” Linley was very satisfied with the effect of his ‘Thunderbolt’ attack.

This black panther possessed a terrifyingly powerful defense. Even the explosive power unleashed by ‘Thunderbolt’ was largely blocked by its extremely tough black fur, and the fur itself seemed to be totally undamaged.

If Linley were only to use raw, brute force and battle-qi against this black panther, he probably wouldn’t be able to wound it at all.

“Time to use my magic.”

Linley began to mumble the words to a magical incantation. Right now, Linley was hanging around thirty or so meters up above the ground off that tree trunk, while the black panther was staring up at him coldly from below. Seeing that Linley didn’t come down, this peak-stage, highly intelligent magical beast of the ninth rank, came to a snap decision.

If you aren’t coming down, I’m coming up!

“Swoosh!” That five-meter tall, enormous black panther suddenly flew into the air, leaping directly towards Linley. With its astonishing springing force, it cleared thirty meters with a single bound.

Linley’s heart was as tranquil as water.

Despite seeing the enormous black panther fly upwards towards himself, he still continued to chant the words to his spell. Only, he slapped the trunk of the tree with his right hand, sending himself flying upwards at an incline at high speed.

The tree which Linley had just slapped instantly split apart by the force of that blow.

“Crash!” The tree toppled to the ground towards the panther.

This tree was enormous enough that when it was falling, it took up half of available space. To the physically small Linley, it didn’t prove a problem at all, but the enormous panther was forced to slash at it with its paws and rip it in half.

Seizing this moment, Linley finally completed the magical incantation he was chanting.

“Swiiish.” On Linley’s back, a pair of translucent, blue wings suddenly appeared. Flashing with azure light, the translucent wings seemed extremely beautiful. With a gentle flap of the wings, Linley’s body rocketed into the air.

Wind-style spell of the eighth rank: Airwings!

Seeing this, the enormous black panther instantly howled with fury. It actually pounced once more towards Linley at high speeds, as Linley flew higher.

“Bam!” Although the black panther had increased in size, it was still extremely dexterous and agile, capable of leaping dozens of meters at a single bound. Borrowing force against the tree trunk, it continued to leap higher and higher up the trees.

But after five or six leaps, the enormous black panther had reached the top of the tallest tree, while right now, Linley flew high above the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts with his translucent wings.

“Now, time for me to thrash you.” Linley saw that the enormous black panther had already leapt towards him from the top of the tallest tree. But now, with nothing to grab on, the black panther had no choice but to allow its body to fall down.

Just as its body began to fall...

“Whoosh!” Linley suddenly spread his wings and rocketed downwards at an astonishing speed.

Through using the astonishing downwards speed granted to him by the Airwings spell, Linley quickly arrived next to the falling enormous black panther. The enormous black panther glared angrily at Linley, but in mid-air, it had nothing to latch onto.

“Haaaaaaaargh!” Linley suddenly activated all of the Dragonblood battle-qi in his body.

Reaching the absolute maximum limit of Dragonblood battle-qi power in an instant, and with both hands gripped tightly around the adamantine heavy sword, Linley delivered a vicious mid-air chop against the falling black panther, which had nowhere to dodge.

“CLANG!” The black panther’s sharp claws once again clashed against the adamantine heavy sword.

But Linley only confidently swung his adamantine heavy sword against it again at high speed. At this moment, the dancing adamantine heavy sword in Linley’s hands had seemed to become one with the wind, slashing down more than ten times against the falling black panther in the space of one second.

With each sword blow, he executed the ‘Thunderbolt’ technique.

“Bam!” “Bam!”

After blocking the very first strike, the black panther’s body had begun to accelerate its downward falling speed. But using his Airwings spell, Linley was still able to match the black panther’s rate of descent. One sword, then another, then another...

The black panther felt as though each sword stroke of Linley’s was more forceful and heavier than the last, and each sword stroke unleashed the same explosive, flood-like burst of power, causing its internal organs to shake.

After taking over ten blows, the body of the enormous black panther was smashed all the way into the ground by Linley.

“BOOM!”

An enormous crater appeared, and cracks appeared in every direction on the ground. The roots of the massive trees around them began to emerge from the ground, uprooted from the force of this collision.

In the middle of the crater, the enormous black panther spat out a large mouthful of fresh blood, and even a hint of blood could be seen coming out of its fur. These repeated blows by Linley’s heavy sword had caused even the black panther’s fur to be unable to withstand all of the attack force.

“Black panther.” Linley stood in midair, over ten meters above it. His translucent wings fluttered. “I know that you understand the human tongue. I’ll give you a chance. As long as you submit to me, I’ll spare your life.”

Right now, Linley really wanted to tame and acquire this magical beast.

Linley had been in sore need of a good mount this entire time. And, even more importantly, this black panther was an extremely superior creature, especially after it transformed in size. Its enormous, two-story tall body, combined with its astonishing speed and defense made it an absolute war machine.

“Growl!”

The enormous black panther stood up, staring coldly at Linley. Its deadly eyes were filled with boundless wrath. Its head was still raised proudly. How could it possibly submit so easily? But right now, the black panther understood that this human warrior in front of it wasn’t the prey it had thought he was. For a warrior to possess such terrifying power and also be able to use a high level wind-style spell such as ‘Airwings’ was an expert which was extremely rare in the human world.

“Are you willing to submit?” Linley shouted from up high.

As far as magical beasts were concerned, only martial force could make them submit and subdue them. And the higher the rank of a magical beast, the more difficult it was to make them submit.

“Groooooowl!” The enormous black panther let out an angry roar.

“If you won’t submit, then I’ll beat you until you do!” Linley was very confident.

When combining his magic with his warrior abilities, his power could rise to an astonishing level. Right now, due to the pair of translucent Airwings on his back, Linley was in total control of the battlefield.

“Swish!” Linley once more dived downwards.

The movement speed of the pair of translucent wings was higher than that which four limbs provided. In the blink of an eye, Linley appeared in front of the enormous black panther as he once more smashed downwards viciously against it with his adamantine heavy sword.

But the black panther only retreated over ten meters at high speed, then pounced forward again.

Flexing his translucent wings, Linley began to dodge about very agilely in the air while constantly chopping downwards with his adamantine heavy sword. Every sword carried with it a terrifying force, capable of flattening a hill.

“Bam!”

The enormous black panther’s body was once more struck by the adamantine heavy sword and knocked flying. Blood had matted its glossy black fur with a red color. Linley stood confidently in midair, ready to strike another blow at the black panther at any moment with his adamantine heavy sword.

“Will you submit?” Linley said in a solemn voice.

The black panther once more rose to its feet, staring coldly at Linley. Suddenly...the black panther’s body began to shrink. It once more shrunk down to a height of two meters and a length of four meters...but the strange thing was, this time, the black panther’s entire body began to glow with a hazy black and white light.

“What on earth?” Sensing danger, Linley quickly flew a bit higher using his translucent wings, cautiously staring down.

That black and white light disappeared. The black panther’s body, previously covered with a large, dense amount of black stripes, now only had a few thick black stripes on its upper body, while the fur on its four limbs had turned as white as snow.

Seeing this, Linley sucked in a cold breath. “Blackcloud Panther? The legendary Blackcloud Panther?”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 7, A Battle of Speed

The most powerful panther-type magical beast would probably be the Saint-level magical beast, “Electrobolt Panther”, a lightning-type magical beast. It was so incredibly fast that other Saint-level beasts simply couldn’t compare to it.

But the most secretive, most mysterious panther-type magical beast would be the ninth-ranked magical beast, ‘Blackcloud Panther’.

According to records, the last time a Blackcloud Panther appeared was over a thousand years ago. Despite so many years having passed, the amount of information which people had managed to collect regarding Blackcloud Panthers remained very scarce.

Blackcloud Panthers were magical beasts of the ninth rank, and extremely fast. Their bodies were covered with just a few black stripes, but their four limbs were snow white, as though they were travelling within a cloud. This was why people gave them the name, ‘Blackcloud Panthers’.

But with regards to what special abilities the Blackcloud Panthers had, or what element they were, the records had no information.

“Most likely, all of the experts who encountered Blackcloud Panthers lost their lives. As for those Saint-level combatants who knew the truth about Blackcloud Panthers, perhaps they intentionally did not reveal any information.” Linley knew very well that many of the more powerful organizations held secrets which were closely guarded. Even spells of the seventh rank would not be revealed. From this, one could imagine how secretive these organizations were.

....

Within this densely forested area in the core region of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, the Blackcloud Panther was exchanging stares with Linley, who was floating in mid-air with translucent wings on his back.

“Blackcloud Panthers can change their size as well as their appearances. They truly are quite mysterious.” Linley didn’t dare to relax at all.

The Blackcloud Panther stared coldly at Linley, its icy eyes filled with fury.

“Swish!”

In the blink of an eye, the Blackcloud Panther crossed the fifty meter gap between itself and Linley. Compared to before, when it was in its first form (normal size and covered with wavy black stripes), it was almost 50% faster.

50%!

For its speed to increase by that much prevented Linley from being able to dodge, and the Blackcloud Panther landed a vicious blow against Linley’s chest. Immediately, the scales on his chest shattered. “Crack!” With a cracking sound, fresh blood leaked out from behind the scales.

“Whoosh.” Linley immediately activated his translucent wings, rapidly rising higher into the air.

“What incredible speed.” Linley felt shocked in his heart.

The Blackcloud Panther, in its first form, was slightly faster than Bebe. In its second form, the large form, the speed of the Blackcloud Panther decreased by 30%, roughly on par with Linley. In its third form, the one it was in right now, it was 50% faster than the original form.

At this current speed, it could cross a hundred meters in the blink of an eye.

How utterly terrifying!

“Groowl.” The Blackcloud Panther raised its head to look up at Linley, its eyes filled with arrogance.

Linley slowly flapped his translucent wings, but didn’t descend yet, merely hovering. Linley knew very well that once he descended, he would find it very difficult to deal with the Blackcloud Panther’s speed.

“Boss, my turn!” Having watched for so long, Bebe could no longer hold himself back.

“Shkreeeech!”

With a terrifying, high-pitched shriek, Bebe transformed into a ferocious black blur, charging at the Blackcloud Panther. The Blackcloud Panther, which hadn’t paid any attention to Bebe at all, was now shocked by Bebe’s speed.

“Supersonic!” Linley immediately cast this supportive magic spell.

He cast the supportive Supersonic spell directly on Bebe. In the past, Bebe had never encountered any magical beasts of the ninth rank faster than himself. Thus, Linley had never seen the need to cast Supersonic on Bebe. But now, Linley finally did so.

In truth, this Supersonic spell was generally used by magi to increase the power of warriors in their squad.

“Swish!” Aided by a Supersonic spell of the eighth rank, Bebe’s speed instantly increased by 30%.

“Slash!” The Blackcloud Panther clawed at Bebe with its fierce claws.

But with his speed increased 30% by the Supersonic spell, although Bebe was still slightly slower than the Blackcloud Panther, the difference wasn’t too huge. More importantly, Bebe was extremely small and nimble.

Bebe constantly changed the direction he was moving in.

“Shkreeech!” Bebe suddenly sped up, pouncing towards the Blackcloud Panther. In mid-pounce, Bebe’s body suddenly enlarged, and then Bebe swiped viciously at the Blackcloud Panther with his paws.

Staring coldly at Bebe, the Blackcloud Panther clawed viciously at Bebe with its own paw as well.

“Slash!”

“Slash!”

Both magical beasts landed blows on each other. Bebe’s claw managed to leave a clear mark on the body of the Blackcloud Panther, and fresh blood began to seep out. But although Bebe was knocked flying as well, he just flipped up to his feet and stood back up, not harmed at all.

“Hrm?” Linley’s eyes turned round in surprise.

“Bebe’s attack power is about on par with mine. So how could Bebe so easily wound it?” Linley was shocked.

Linley knew very well how powerful Bebe’s defense was. After all, when they had been in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts last time, Bebe was just an early-stage magical beast of the eighth rank, but he could withstand the dying blow of an Armored Razorback Wyrms without perishing. Now that Bebe had entered the ninth rank, his terrifyingly strong defense was even more powerful than Linley’s. Linley didn’t find it surprising at all that Bebe was uninjured. But the strange thing was, the defense of the Blackcloud Panther had just dropped.

“Ah! I understand.”

Linley suddenly understood the special characteristics of the three forms of the Blackcloud Panther. The first form was a balanced one in terms of defense, speed, and offense. The second, giant form, prioritized offense at the expense of speed. As for this form, the third one, although it raised speed to an astonishing level, its defense dropped in turn.

Right now, the Blackcloud Panther and Bebe were staring at each other. The Blackcloud Panther could feel that it was bleeding, and it was beginning to worry...because this freak of a magical beast in front of it hadn’t been hurt at all.

“Blackcloud Panther.” Linley spoke.

The Blackcloud Panther looked up at Linley.

Linley didn’t speak to the Blackcloud Panther as though it were an inferior life form. Rather, Linley spoke to it as he would a creature of equal intelligence. “Blackcloud Panther, in your current form, you should possess great speed but low defense. In this form, you aren’t even able to overcome Bebe.”

“Growl.” The Blackcloud Panther snarled unhappily.

The Blackcloud Panther then stared at Bebe, and from its jaw came a series of strange growls. Bebe was startled for a moment, and then let out an enraged growl of his own.

“Boss. This Blackcloud Panther can speak the tongue of us rodent-type magical beasts.” Bebe said mentally to Linley.

Linley knew very well that Bebe was born understanding the rodent language. But the languages of other magical beasts were different; each different type of magical beast had their own language.

Some extremely long-lived magical beasts, however, were skilled at communicating using the languages of other types of magical beasts.

This Blackcloud Panther was a peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank. Not only did it know many languages of other types of magical beasts, it also understood the human tongue. Only, it was unable to reproduce the human sounds due to physical reasons. Only upon reaching the Saint-level, when it could begin to alter its body, could it speak the human tongue.

“What did it say?” Linley asked.

Bebe and the Blackcloud Panther engaged in a discussion through growls and angry snarls. Suddenly, Bebe and the Blackcloud Panther seemed to get into an argument, as the fur on both magical beasts stood up straight.

“Growl!!”

“Shkreeech!”

The two magical beasts suddenly began to engage in a wild battle, as their shadows flashed against each other again and again. Fresh blood began to fly everywhere...

Their angry growls unabated, the two magical beasts exchanged blows at high speed, and the trees and boulders nearby suffered the brunt of their fury.

The trees toppled. The boulders shattered.

Every place these two magical beasts crossed through turned into a debris-strewn area.

Suddenly, the two beasts separated again. Bebe hunched down, growling as he stared at the Blackcloud Panther. The Blackcloud Panther stared at Bebe in the same manner, as though facing a fierce opponent.

But the Blackcloud Panther’s body was covered in blood.

With its defense lowered, it was unable to resist Bebe’s claw attacks. And in terms of speed, boosted by the Supersonic spell, Bebe was only slightly slower than it was.

Bebe growled angrily towards the Blackcloud Panther.

The Blackcloud Panther roared back towards Bebe.

“Boss, this Blackcloud Panther isn’t willing to submit. It says that you simply don’t have the ability to defeat it on your own.” Bebe said mentally to Linley. “Boss, let me kill it.”

Right now, the Blackcloud Panther was extremely frustrated.

If it used its first two forms, its speed was inferior to its opponent and it would be trampled. But after increasing its speed by entering its ‘wind-style form’, its defense was lowered.

The Blackcloud Panther knew that the human opponent was capable of flight.

The speed one could reach flying was definitely greater than the speed one could reach through running on all fours. In terms of short term bursts, it could exceed Linley in speed. But if it were to flee, Bebe and Linley would definitely be able to easily catch up to it.

“Blackcloud Panther, you think I can’t beat you?” Linley said loudly.

The Blackcloud Panther immediately raised its head arrogantly as it looked at Linley. In close quarters combat, the speed boost provided by the translucent wings couldn’t be put on full display. It didn’t fear Linley at all.

“Fine.” Linley nodded.

And then, Linley began to mutter the words to another spell as well, causing the Blackcloud Panther to be suspicious. But as a wind-type magical beast as well, the Blackcloud Panther wasn’t afraid of Linley having access to any particularly powerful wind-type spells. In addition, it knew that if it were to now flee, Linley would be able to catch up to it.

“Thruuumm.”

Centered around the body of the Blackcloud Panther, a circular area a hundred meters in circumference suddenly began to glow with a layer of earth elemental essence. These earth elemental essences were throbbing with a certain frequency.

The Blackcloud Panther suddenly felt a terrifyingly powerful gravitational force tug at it, causing it to hunch over. Even the blood inside its body as well as its heart were affected, causing it to feel rather dizzy.

Earth-style magic – Supergravity Field!

The Supergravity Field created by a magus of the eighth rank was able to increase the local gravity by a factor of eight. This increased gravitational field's effect wasn't as simple as say adding 1000 pounds of weight to a man who already weighed 200 pounds. The eight-fold gravity also impacted the heart, the spleen, and the other internal organs.

An ordinary person might be able to carry 100-200 pounds of weight.

But under a double-strength gravitational field, his heart might not be able to stand the pressure and might break down.

After all, although the external muscles were easily trained, it was very hard to train internal organs such as the heart. At the very least, the rate of training the internal organs was much slower than the external muscles.

Suddenly ambushed by a field of eight-fold gravity, the Blackcloud Panther couldn't help but feel dizzy.

Not giving it a chance to recover, Linley, his entire body covered with earth elemental essence, charged in, and began to wildly unleash upon the Blackcloud Panther...vicious punches and kicks!

Yes, he didn't use the adamantine heavy sword!

Only his fists and his feet!

"Growl!" The body of a magical beast of the ninth rank was extremely sturdy, and very soon, it became used to the greater gravity. But under the influence of an eight-fold gravity, it didn't even have half the speed it previously had.

"Swish!" "Swish!"

"Bam!"

A kick landed hard against the Blackcloud Panther's waist, and then Linley rushed to the opposite side, landing a vicious punch on the Blackcloud Panther's body and sending it flying back in the other direction.

In ten short seconds, the Blackcloud Panther had been thoroughly ravaged by Linley's punches and kicks. Its current speed was totally insufficient for escaping the confines of the Supergravity Field. And what's more, Bebe was watching intently from the side as well.

"Do you submit?"

"Do you submit?"

.....

While shouting loudly, Linley wildly continued to whale away at it with his fists and feet. Linley was beating this peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank, the Blackcloud Panther, into a state where it couldn't resist at all. One mouthful after another of blood was leaking from its mouth.

“Groooooowl!” The Blackcloud Panther suddenly let out a howl of grief and anger.

“Boss. He submits.”

“Bam!” Linley's fists were moving too fast, and he landed one final punch on the Blackcloud Panther's skull, smashing it to the ground.

Laughing, Linley looked at the Blackcloud Panther, which was on all fours, pressed against the ground. Under the influence of the eight-fold gravity, the blood flowing through the veins of the Blackcloud Panther had grown sluggish as well. And now, after having been beaten wildly by Linley in such a manner, the Blackcloud Panther had become quite dizzy.

“Do you submit?” Linley laughed as he looked at the Blackcloud Panther.

Although Linley was laughing, under the total Dragonform transformation, Linley's eyes were still that calm, emotionless dark gold color. And how could one tell that Linley was smiling beneath all of those scales on his face?

The Blackcloud Panther raised his head to look at Linley, paying particular attention to the translucent wings on Linley's back. His heart trembled. He was afraid of being brutalized by Linley yet again. Immediately, it nodded. And in fact, he really had mentally submitted to Linley's display of prowess. For a combatant to be so powerful as a warrior and as a magus was more than enough to force it to submit.

Smiling, Linley immediately began to set up a soul-binding magical array!

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 8, Leaving the Mountains

Virtually all magi knew how to set up a soul-binding magic array. But in terms of actually setting one up, there were certain requirements. Generally speaking, only upon reaching the seventh rank as a magus did one have sufficient spiritual strength to set it up.

A nearly translucent pentagram was floating in mid-air.

And then, the pentagram magic formation flew towards the head of the Blackcloud Panther, who didn't resist at all, allowing the magical formation to enter his mind. Suddenly, both Linley and the Blackcloud Panther could feel that their spirits were now interconnected.

This was not the same as the 'bond of equals' which Linley and Bebe shared.

In the 'bond of equals' between Linley and Bebe, both of their souls had become intermingled. With this soul-binding magic array, however, was formed solely from Linley's spiritual energy. When the Blackcloud Panther accepted the soul-binding compact, naturally Linley was the master.

"Master." The Blackcloud Panther was extremely respectful.

Linley looked at the Blackcloud Panther. "What is your name?" Linley knew that some high-class magical beasts had names of their own. For example, that Armored Razorback Wurm which Linley had encountered in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts' Foggy Valley had been named Sartius.

The Blackcloud Panther's voice sounded in Linley's mind. "Master, my name is Haeru [Hei'lu]."

"Haeru?" Linley memorized the name.

"Haeru, tell me about your transformation abilities." Towards this topic, Linley felt quite a bit of interest.

The Blackcloud Panther nodded. "Master, it is because I am a dual-element magical beast of both darkness and wind elements. In my brain, I have two magicite cores; one is darkness element, the other is wind element. Normally, I am in my first form, where my defense, offense, and speed are all equal."

"When I rely primarily on the energy from my darkness magicite core, my body will increase in size and my attack power will go up, at the expense of speed. When I rely primarily on the energy from my wind magicite core, I will be in this form, the wind-style form, with great speed but weaker defense."

The Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, said honestly.

Linley now understood.

So Blackcloud Panthers were dual-element magical beasts of wind and darkness, and this current form was the wind-style form. The giant form was the darkness-style form, and only the original form was the 'normal' form.

"I had originally thought that Haeru's current form was his normal form." Linley snickered to himself.

Linley suspected that the person who had written the records which Linley had read regarding Blackcloud Panthers had only seen this wind-style form, and thus mistook this as the only form of the Blackcloud Panthers.

“Growl!” Bebe ran over, growling in a low voice towards the Blackcloud Panther.

The Blackcloud Panther began to chat with him as well.

“Looks like our journey will be more interesting in the future.” A hint of a smile was on Linley’s face.

.....

Alongside his two magical beast companions, Bebe and Haeru, Linley continued his daily training regime. Linley immersed himself in the world of sword-training. Every so often, Linley would have some new insights regarding how to use his heavy sword.

Spring left, autumn came.

In the blink of an eye, another year had passed.

That fall in the second year, the temperature had dropped to a murderous low. Linley was seated cross-legged beneath an ancient oak, training. The Dragonblood battle-qi had suddenly begun to boil, causing his blood vessels and his heart to once again begin to change and transform.

In addition, within Linley’s dantian, the Dragonblood battle-qi had finally begun to change as well. Excited, Linley let out a laugh. He had finally broken past the late-stage of the seventh rank and reached the eighth rank. He had become a warrior of the eighth rank!

As a warrior of the eighth rank, upon totally Dragonforming, Linley’s power was now at the peak-stage of the ninth rank.

There was a significant difference between a peak-stage ninth rank warrior and an early-stage ninth rank warrior.

“When I was in Hess City, it was hard for me to even break past the armor of an ordinary magical beast of the ninth rank. But now, even without using the adamantine heavy sword, I can kill most magical beasts of the ninth rank.” Linley was extremely confident.

A peak-stage Dragonblood Warrior of the ninth rank could definitely vanquish a peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank.

Aside from Saint-levels, perhaps there was nobody in the world who could threaten him anymore.

“Only, the higher level of using this adamantine heavy sword, this so-called ‘impose’ level...what is it?” Linley began to frown. Right now, Linley had completely mastered the technique of ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’.

He walked barefooted on the ground.

Linley continued on his path of training, constantly harmonizing himself with the pulsing thrum of the earth and the indistinct ebbs and flows of the wind. In turn, Linley’s spirit became purified by nature, becoming more agile and graceful.

....

Winter arrived.

In the morning, a great blizzard had descended, covering the entire world with blankets of falling snow. Standing in the middle of the snowstorm, Linley stared up at the snowflakes falling from the sky. His heart was very peaceful.

Suddenly, Linley sat down cross-legged, placing the adamantine heavy sword across his lap. His upper body was still bare, and he still wore that ragged pair of hempcloth pants.

The snow settled on top of Linley's body, but Linley didn't notice it at all.

Time passed. The snow continued to fall from morning until nightfall, covering the entire area with a layer of snow as thick as one's foot.

Bebe and Haeru had hidden themselves underneath a large pine tree, where they watched Linley.

"Impose."

Linley's eyes opened. Within them, there was a hint of a smile. Raising his head to stare in front of him, he saw that the snow had ceased to fall. Although it was almost dark, the entire world had been painted a light white color by the snow.

"Groooooowl!" From far away, the roar of a magical beast could be heard.

A Glacial Snow Lion was striding on the snow. Apparently having discovered Linley, it began to draw close to Linley, one step at a time. Watching the Glacial Snow Lion draw near, Linley didn't seem to react at all.

"Swoosh!" With a mighty leap, the Glacial Snow Lion pounced towards Linley.

Linley watched as the Glacial Snow Lion pounced towards him. Very casually, he grabbed the adamantine heavy sword that had been lying in his lap and chopped directly towards the Glacial Snow Lion.

"Rumble!" The moment Linley swung the adamantine heavy sword, space itself seemed to suddenly be compressed in the area around the sword, in the direction of the Glacial Snow Lion.

Terrified, the Glacial Snow Lion wished to flee, but the entire area around it was compressed by that pressuring force. It had nowhere to run.

Facing this heavy sword, it had no choice but to take it head on.

"Bam!"

The heavy sword slammed against the Glacial Snow Lion's body. The Glacial Snow Lion's entire body trembled momentarily, then suddenly disintegrated into a pile of flesh and blood.

"So 'impose' refers to 'imposing' one's will on the heavens and the earth, to the point where even space itself can become used to constrict someone. Haha..." Linley laughed.

After having experienced that huge blizzard, Linley finally entered the third level of wielding heavy weapons; the 'impose' level. Only, Linley understood that he had just barely begun to grasp this level.

"To be able to so quickly grasp the 'impose' level, I really must give thanks to my training as a stonesculptor as well as my insights as a magus." Linley felt very happy.

Because he was a magus, Linley's soul could more clearly sense the throbbing pulse of the earth as well as the flows of the wind. His soul was capable now of becoming one with nature. In addition, this entire time, Linley had been extremely focused on his training and had accumulated a great deal of experience. This allowed Linley to finally surpass that initial barrier and enter the 'impose' level of wielding the heavy sword.

In terms of power, the 'impose' level was far more terrifying than the level of 'wielding something heavy as though it were light'. It was also far more profound and mysterious.

....

Spring. Year 10003 of the Yulan calendar. The northernmost edge of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts was only a few kilometers away from the North Sea. In fact, from the northernmost point in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, one could see the vast, endless expanse of water known as the North Sea.

Between the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and the North Sea, there was a corridor which linked the Holy Union and the O'Brien Empire together. Almost every day, large numbers of people passed through this wide road.

Virtually everyone, be it the merchants of the O'Brien Empire, the merchants of the Holy Union, or others, passed through this corridor.

However, the citizens of the O'Brien Empire, when facing the citizens of the Holy Union, felt a sense of natural superiority. This was because the O'Brien Empire was the most powerful Empire in the entire Yulan continent. What's more, it possessed the 'War God'. In the war-loving O'Brien Empire, virtually every citizen was proud to belong to the O'Brien Empire.

Right now, on the wide corridor, there was a merchant caravan with hundreds of people that were camping and resting. Many people were currently eating.

"Old Hett [Hei'te]."

A young man riding on a carriage chuckled at a chubby man next to him. "You've made a fortune on this latest deal."

"Haha." That middle-aged fatty laughed contentedly. "Petrie [Pi'te'li], you are a smart young fellow. If you continue to work for me, in three years time, you'll be able to buy a manor in your hometown, then buy a few beautiful serving maids and hire a few manservants. You'll be able to live a happy life as an estate owner."

"Three years? Shit, in three more years I probably will have lost my life." The youngster swore. "A new person like myself is always assigned the most dangerous tasks. Alas...in one year, I'll go back home, buy a beautiful girl, and enjoy life. Estate owner? That'll depend on whether or not I have that good fortune."

The middle-aged fatty began to laugh. "You are a newcomer. Of course it falls on you to take on the most dangerous tasks. However, that means you get a large share as well. Oh, right. Petrie, this time in our caravan, there's a very beautiful girl. As we are headed the same way, we are escorting her."

"Are you talking about Miss Jenne [Zhan'en]?" The young fellow's eyes instantly lit up. "If I had a woman like that, I'd be willing to work for ten more years. That figure. That aura. Oh, man..."

"But she clearly is a noble, and that old servant of hers isn't weak either." The middle aged fatty chortled.

"Can't I at least fantasize?" The youngster said unhappily.

The middle aged fatty began to laugh, but then he suddenly looked towards the south. “Hrm? Petrie, look. Someone is coming out from within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.” Petrie immediately looked south towards the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

Dressed in an ordinary blue warrior’s uniform, a man carrying a heavy sword on his back was walking out from within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. His long brown hair just barely reached his shoulders. By the looks of it, he was nearly two meters tall.

By his side was a black panther that was nearly as tall as he was, and on the back of that black panther was a black Shadowmouse.

“What is that black panther?” Petrie said in astonishment.

Staring with wide eyes, the middle-aged man said, “Don’t cause a ruckus! I’ve heard that all panther-type and lion-type magical beasts are very powerful. Generally speaking, they are at least magical beasts of the sixth rank, or even higher.”

Immediately, Petrie no longer dared to make a sound.

Right at this moment, the brown-haired man began jogging towards their caravan with long strides. The caravan guards immediately became alert. The person coming towards them was clearly a powerful warrior.

.....

Right now, Linley was in an excellent mood. After three full years of hard training, he had finally left the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

“The Northern Sea is indeed vast.” This was the first time Linley had seen the North Sea, and the sight of that enormous, boundless sky-blue sea stunned Linley, filling him with awe.

Seeing the resting caravan in front of him, Linley jogged in that direction.

“Hey, friend, what do you want?” A heavily bearded guard shouted out loudly. Smiling, Linley replied, “I’m headed for the O’Brien Empire. I hope you can take me along with you.”

The heavily bearded guard looked at Linley, then turned towards a middle-aged, golden-haired man next to him. After exchanging a few words, he said to Linley in a loud voice, “That’s easy. Twenty gold coins, and we’ll take you with us.”

“Fine.” Linley agreed very readily. He immediately pulled out a small sack of gold, counted out twenty gold coins, and handed it over.

This outfit Linley was currently wearing had been stored in the interspatial ring, ready for just an occasion such as this. In his interspatial ring, Linley naturally had prepared quite a few things.

“Hey, friend, since you already have a mount, do you plan to ride in a carriage, or on this panther?” The heavily bearded man asked warmly.

“In a carriage, I suppose.” Linley said.

“Fine. You can go get inside that cart in the back. That one right there, the flat cart with two people in it.” The heavily bearded man pointed as he spoke. Actual covered carriages were rather expensive, and in this caravan, the majority of the soldiers all rode in flat carts.

“Sure.” Linley agreed quite casually.

As he walked over to and reached that flat cart, the two men already in the cart, previously engaged in conversation, were immediately terrified by Haeru, who was walking alongside Linley. Panther-type magical beasts were generally high class magical beasts, after all.

“Ah, friend, please, sit.” The two men were incredibly friendly.

Linley entered the cart. The cart had mattresses made of hay inside, which were covered by a thick cotton cloth. As Linley sat on top of a hay mattress, Bebe jumped right onto Linley’s shoulders as well.

“Come, friend, have some wine.” The slightly older one of the two men warmly offered.

“Thanks.” Linley accepted the wineskin and took a large gulp.

“Hey, everybody, get ready. We’re about to start moving again!” A loud voice rang out, and all the people who had got off their carriages for a rest immediately got back into their carriages.

The caravan began to move forward again, embarking once more on its journey towards the O’Brien Empire...

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 9, Olivier

Travelling on this seemingly endless, winding road, this caravan with hundreds of people didn't move at too rapid a pace. All of the guards of the caravan maintained a careful eye in the direction of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts at all times.

There were two major sources of danger on this road. The first was the magical beasts in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. The second was bandits. Because this road which was hundreds of miles long was controlled by neither the Holy Union nor the O'Brien Empire, there naturally were many bandits here.

"Squeak. Squeak." The carriage wheels squeaked rhythmically, and Linley lay back, enjoying the strong liquor in the wineskin.

"It's been three years since I've touched alcohol. This rough liquor feels even more enjoyable to me than those exquisite wines the Jade Water Paradise used to have." Though he laughed, Linley was sighing in his heart as well. Meanwhile, by his side, Bebe was very enjoyably munching on pieces of roasted meat.

The older of the two soldiers whom Linley was sharing this cart with said, "Friend, my name is Lowndes [Lang'si]. This is my younger friend. His name is Luther [Lu'de]."

Linley was slightly startled. He understood that these two wished to know his name, but Linley knew that his name was already on the Red List of the Radiant Church as someone who must be killed on sight.

"You can call me 'Ley'." Linley said with a laugh.

"Ley, what level of magical beast is this panther of yours?" That young fellow named Luther immediately asked enthusiastically. "This magical beast's fur is so smooth. Riding on such a magical beast really would be so majestic! I think it must be at least a magical beast of the seventh rank."

"All you need to know is that he is a high-class magical beast." Linley said casually.

The Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, who had been loping alongside the cart, suddenly fixed Luther with its cold eyes. Seeing Haeru's gaze, Luther immediately was so frightened that he could only smile weakly in response.

Everyone in the Yulan continent knew that magical beasts possessed intelligence which was no less than that of men. They definitely couldn't be treated like domesticated household pets. If you tried to, the results would be disastrous.

"The two of you belong to the Holy Union? Or to the O'Brien Empire?" Linley asked.

Linley knew very little regarding the O'Brien Empire.

"We are both from the O'Brien Empire." Lowndes said with a chortle. "Ley, how about you?"

"This will be my first trip to the O'Brien Empire. I've long heard that the O'Brien Empire has a tremendous martial spirit, but have never experienced it for myself." Linley said calmly.

Both Luther and Lowndes lived by the edges of their blades. They possessed quite good insight, and could easily tell that Linley was an extremely powerful person. After all, in order to be able to subdue a powerful magical beast, one had to be able to totally dominate it with power first. Only then would it submit.

“Ley, we citizens of the O’Brien Empire greatly revere powerful combatants. No matter where you go, you will be received with great courtesy, given your power.” Lowndes said with a chuckle. “Ley, if this is your first time visiting the O’Brien Empire, do you know much about it?”

“Aside from knowing that the O’Brien Empire has seven administrative provinces and knowing about the War God, I don’t know much.” Linley laughed.

As the most militarily powerful of the Four Great Empires, the O’Brien Empire’s territory was also the largest amongst the six major powers. Each of those seven provinces was significantly larger than a kingdom.

“Ley, let me explain. Our Empire has a large number of experts. Even combatants of the ninth rank don’t dare to be arrogant in the Imperial Capital. After all, the War God’s College is settled down atop one of the mountains just outside the Imperial Capital.” Lowndes explained enthusiastically.

“The War God’s College?” Linley had no idea what this was.

Next to him, Luther hurriedly said, “Ley, you absolutely must be aware of this. The highest, most holiest training site in the entire O’Brien Empire is the War God’s College. Every hundred years or so, or sometimes every few hundred years, the War God will accept a single disciple whom he will personally teach. The number of direct disciples he has is extremely few, but eight or nine out of every ten people whom the War God accepts as a disciple will become a Saint-level combatant.”

Hearing this, Linley was truly stunned.

Previously, he was under the impression that the O’Brien Academy was the most elite training academy in existence, but now, clearly, this War God’s College was far superior to it.

“But it really is too difficult for one to be accepted as a disciple by the War God. Even the honorary disciples whom he doesn’t personally teach will only see one added to their number every two years or so.” Lowndes sighed.

Just one disciple every year or two, and an honorary one at that.

This acceptance rate was even lower by far than that of the Ernst Institute. But one could understand if one thought about it. After all, this had to do with taking the War God as one’s teacher and master. The War God...an entity who had surpassed the Saint-level over five thousand years ago.

“Therefore, Ley, in the future, if you meet anyone from the War God’s College, you have to be careful. Even if they decide to kill someone, usually no one will interfere.” Lowndes advised.

Linley understood.

The War God, O’Brien, was the founding Emperor of the O’Brien Empire. Although he had abdicated long ago, his influence in the O’Brien Empire was much higher than the reigning Emperor. The War God O’Brien absolutely was the backbone and main pillar of the entire O’Brien Empire.

“Right. Have you heard of any geniuses appearing recently in the O’Brien Empire?” Linley suddenly asked. What Linley was thinking was, “The density of Dragonblood in the veins of Wharton was even higher than mine, hence he could naturally become a Dragonblood Warrior. His potential should be higher than mine as well. By now, Wharton should be seventeen. He should be very famous in the O’Brien Empire.”

Given the speed at which a Dragonblood Warrior trained at...

Generally speaking, in a few decades, they could reach the Saint-level. If one trained hard, one would be able to reach the ninth rank within twenty years, and the eighth rank within ten.

Wharton's innate talent definitely should be enough to stun the Empire.

"Prodigy? Are you talking about Olivier, the Prodigy Sword Saint?" Lowndes asked.

"The Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier?" Linley had never heard this name before. "Why is this Olivier known as the Prodigy Sword Saint?"

Next to him, Luther hurriedly said, "Ley, if in the Empire, someone hears you say that you don't know who the Prodigy Sword Saint is, they will laugh at you. Do you know how old Lord Olivier was when he reached the Saint-level?"

He was a Saint-level combatant?

"How old?" Linley actually was extremely calm. He was a member of the Dragonblood Warrior clan, who generally could reach the Saint-level in a few decades. Generally speaking, those so-called Prodigies would still need nearly a century.

"Forty seven!" Luther said worshipfully. "Lord Olivier was a combatant of the ninth rank by age thirty, and by age forty seven, entered the Saint-level. And three years ago, that year when the Holy Union and the Dark Alliance suffered the 'Apocalypse Day', Olivier entered the Saint-level."

Linley nodded slightly.

It seemed as though that cataclysmic day had been dubbed the 'Apocalypse Day'.

"No wonder I haven't heard of him." Linley understood now. When this person's fame became widespread, Linley had just entered the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and embarked on his three years of toilsome training.

That Luther clearly worshipped this Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier. He hurriedly said, "Ley, let me tell you something. When Lord Olivier reached the ninth rank, the War God actively reached out to him and invited him to become his student. But Lord Olivier refused. He wanted to walk on his own training path."

Linley couldn't help but begin to admire this Olivier. A War God who had surpassed the Saint-level long ago wanted to accept him as a disciple, but he actually refused. Indeed, only a man with supreme confidence could do such a thing.

"This is the first person to refuse the War God in all of history." Luther said worshipfully. "Ley, at first, many people thought that Olivier was insane and insulted him. But...Lord Olivier wasn't just bragging. Three years ago, when Olivier entered the Saint-level, he immediately challenged the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon."

"Dillon?" Linley frowned.

Linley could still clearly remember that when those two Saint-level combatants did battle in the skies above Wushan township, one of them had been the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon. The other was a Saint-level Grand Magus, Rudi. These two names had been forever engraved in Linley's mind.

“Right. Lord Dillon, the Stellar Sword Saint, has been famous for a long time, and he has been a Saint-level combatant for nearly a century. Olivier had just entered the Saint-level, and he immediately went to challenge Dillon. Many people thought that Olivier was too brash and arrogant. But the day of their duel...”

Luther’s eyes were filled with awe and worship. “Within three sword strokes, the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon, had been defeated. To be able to defeat the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon, as soon as he entered the Saint-level was something which stunned everyone. Only now, due to his power, was he publically acknowledged as a genius.”

Linley, too, was filled with admiration.

In the past, he had often discussed powerful combatants with Grandpa Doehring. Linley knew very well...that there was a large difference between early-stage Saints, middle-stage Saints, late-stage Saints, and peak-stage Saints.

Dillon had reached the Saint-level nearly a hundred years ago, but he was defeated in just three sword strokes by the Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier. Linley had to admit that Olivier was incredibly powerful. What’s more, he had only been forty seven years old.

For someone to reach the Saint-level at forty seven years of age, and be so powerful.

Even the Supreme Warriors wouldn’t be much better than this.

.....

Chatting with these hired soldiers who travelled everywhere, Linley learned a great deal regarding the O’Brien Empire, giving him a good sense of the area.

By nightfall, the caravan once more came to a halt.

Campfires were lit everywhere, and all sorts of wild roasted dishes were brought out. Linley followed Luther and Lowndes to a campfire, where they began to roast chunks of leg meat.

Linley suddenly turned to look in the direction of Haeru. Right at that moment, a young nobleman dressed in a suit was standing next to the Blackcloud Panther, looking excitedly at it.

“What a beautiful panther.” The young nobleman’s eyes were shining like gems as he stared at the Blackcloud Panther. He even stretched his hand out, intending to touch him.

The Blackcloud Panther was a peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank. He was extremely arrogant. How could he allow an ordinary person to touch it?

The Blackcloud Panther suddenly swung its head , fixing its cold eyes upon that young nobleman. Unhappily, he began to let out a menacing growl. “Groooooowl.”

“Ah!!!” Terrified, the young nobleman quickly retreated, falling on his back as he did. His face was white with fear.

“Haha.” Luther, Lowndes, and Linley all began to laugh.

At this time, the brocade door to a nearby carriage was pushed open, and a young woman dressed in a light violet dress immediately jumped out of the carriage, frightened. “Keane [Ji’en], Keane, what happened?”

Seeing this woman, Linley’s eyes suddenly lit up.

This full-body dress was rather tight, revealing her lithe, slim little waist, as well as making her chest swell all the more. As she ran, her long hair fluttered about.

That slender figure was one of the top three female figures Linley had ever seen. Judging by her appearance, she should be seventeen or eighteen years old.

“Big sis, big sis!” That young noble clutched this lady in terror.

Haeru, the Blackcloud Panther, let out another dissatisfied growl in the direction of the young nobleman. This terrified the young noblewoman so much that her face instantly turned white as well.

“Don’t be afraid. Haeru won’t hurt you.” Linley called out, laughing.

“Haha, Miss Jenne, you need to take good care of your little brother. This powerful magical beast isn’t one of your household pets. If he pisses it off, it might eat him. Hahaha!” Lowndes laughed loudly.

These words made the faces of both Jenne and the young nobleman turn white.

Jenne pulled the young nobleman to his feet, and then quickly curtsied in apology. “Sorry, sorry.”

“No need to apologize to us. This black panther is Ley’s. You can apologize to him.” Luther joined the fun as well.

Jenne glanced at Linley. Clearly, she wasn’t good at interacting with people. Her face immediately turned red upon looking at him. “Lord Ley, so sorry.”

“It’s fine. In the future, just make sure your little brother doesn’t irritate Haeru anymore.” Linley laughed. It had been a long time since he had met a girl who was so easily embarrassed.

Jenne immediately pulled the young nobleman by the hand in the direction of that nearby carriage.

“Amusing, amusing.” Linley laughed, raising the wineskin to his lips for another swig.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 10, A Single Sword

“Ley, what do you think of that Miss Jenne? She’s quite something, isn’t she?” Lowndes said with a quiet chortle.

“She is quite something.” Linley nodded in praise.

Next to them, Luther walked over. “She isn’t just ‘something’. In all these years I’ve been roaming about, I’ve seen countless beautiful women. But Miss Jenne...heh heh...she’s absolutely tops. Ley, are you interested in Miss Jenne?”

Linley blinked in shock.

Lowndes also glanced at Linley with a wink that all men understood. “Ley, it’s quite normal for powerful people to have beauties with them. If you don’t seize the opportunity, after you leave the caravan, you won’t have another chance.”

“You two...” Linley didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Alice had long ago caused Linley to seal off his heart with respect to romantic love. And right now, Linley wasn’t yet at the stage where he was ravenous and would just go chasing after every beautiful girl he saw.

“Miss Jenne and her little brother just came out.” Luther suddenly said in a soft voice.

Linley turned to look. Indeed, Miss Jenne and her younger brother Keane were headed towards a campfire, which was currently manned by her elderly servant.

That young noble, Keane, couldn’t help but turn to look at the Blackcloud Panther again.

The Blackcloud Panther immediately revealed its gleaming, cold fangs. Keane was so terrified that he tightly clutched his sister’s hands. Miss Jenne, as though sensing something, turned to look in Linley’s direction as well.

Nodding somewhat apologetically at Linley, Miss Jenne led her little brother to sit next to the campfire.

....

“Big sis, that magical beast is so handsome!” Keane’s eyes were as bright as gems and filled with longing. “It’ll be great if one day, I too have a powerful magical beast.”

The old servant chuckled. “Young master Keane, taming a magical beast is no easy feat. To tame a powerful magical beast, you must totally subdue it, and to subdue it, you must defeat it head on. From what I know, the weakest type of panther-type magical beasts are all of the seventh rank. That Lord Ley is a truly powerful combatant.”

“The weakest is a magical beast of the seventh rank?” Keane sucked in a cold breath. “Grandpa Lambert, is it as powerful as you, Grandpa Lambert [Lan’bo’tē]?”

In Keane’s mind, the person he worshipped the most in the world was his Grandpa Lambert.

When him and his sister were in the Holy Union, they had no one to rely on at all. The entire time, it was Grandpa Lambert who had protected them. If it wasn't for Grandpa Lambert, those nobles in the town they lived in would've sent people long ago to seize his sister. He had personally seen Grandpa Lambert shatter a noble's guard's shield with one punch, then easily defeat ten guards.

"Me? I just have a bit of ability. He could kill me in one blow with ease." Lambert chuckled, rubbing Keane's head. "Young master Keane, when we arrive in the O'Brien Empire, you must be careful. There are many experts in this world. I'm only able to protect you in places like those small towns. But when we reach the big cities..."

"It's fine! This time, we're going to assume the position of city governor, right?" Keane arrogantly raised his little head up high. "When I'm the city governor, who will I fear?"

Looking at Keane, Jenne couldn't help but also affectionately pat Keane on his little head. "Keane, in the future, you will be a majestic city governor."

"Of course." Keane was very confident.

.....

Slowly, most people in the caravan began to drift off to sleep. Only a few mercenaries remained awake in a defensive perimeter around the caravan. Linley was seated cross-legged on the ground, the adamantine heavy sword placed on his lap as always.

Linley didn't know how the ancestors of his clan had trained in the third level of using the heavy sword, the 'impose' level. But Linley's training method was to allow his soul to become one with the great earth and one with the boundless wind.

The earth possessed a wondrous throbbing pulse of its own.

That unique pulse had its own unique rhythm, which Linley submerged himself into. As for the boundless wind which filled all the skies, it had a deep, intimate connection with space, which was also an important part of being able to understand the essence of the 'impose' level.

Submerged within nature...understanding nature...

In this state, Linley didn't notice the passage of time at all. By the second half of the night, when the vast majority of the caravan was asleep, only a few hired mercenaries maintained their watchful vigilance.

"Rasp, rasp."

Deep night. The cold wind was blowing, and it rustled against the tips of Linley's hair. Linley's closed eyes suddenly opened, and then he sheathed the adamantine heavy sword onto his back.

"Get up." Linley patted Lowndes and Luther twice each.

Lowndes and Luther were both mercenaries who lived by the edges of their weapons. They slept very lightly. Immediately, they woke up. Lowndes and Luther quickly saw that it was still midnight.

"Ley, it's late at night. Why aren't you sleeping?" Lowndes was a bit unhappy, but he didn't dare to complain.

"Bandits are coming." Linley said casually.

"Oh."

Luther's eyes were drifting closed again, but then suddenly they snapped open. Staring at Linley in shock, he said, "Ley, what'd you say? Bandits are coming?"

"A group of roughly a hundred or so bandits are approaching us from approximately three hundred meters in front. They're slowly making their way here." Linley continued.

Just then, Linley had been communing with the throbbing pulse of the earth and the flows of the wind.

Linley could clearly feel those hundred or so feet coming from hundreds of meters away. Naturally, under normal conditions, Linley wouldn't have been able to detect them so early. But after having become one with nature, he naturally was far more sensitive.

Luther was frightened.

"Don't stand there like an idiot. Wake up all of our brothers." Lowndes was far calmer.

"Oh. Got it." Luther immediately left to wake up one mercenary after another, while Lowndes went to warn all of the mercenaries who were on guard.

Being woken up from their sweet dreams in the middle of the night, the mercenaries were naturally all unhappy.

"Bandits coming." But that phrase was enough to shock them into scrambling up.

"Where are they?" Staring in all directions into the pitch black night, the awakened mercenaries couldn't even see the shadow of a bandit. All of them began to grow unhappy.

The leader of the mercenaries, a heavily bearded man, grabbed Lowndes by his shirt. "You said there are bandits. Where?"

"Not me. It was Ley who said there are bandits." Lowndes hurriedly explained.

"Oh?" The heavily bearded man was shocked. With regards to this expert whom they picked up mid-way through their journey, just by looking at that black panther, the heavily bearded man knew that this was no one he could afford to offend. For an expert to make this claim, he clearly wouldn't just be playing a prank.

And just at this moment, the heavily bearded man could also begin to hear the extremely soft sounds of stealthy footsteps coming from afar.

Given the heavily bearded man's power, he could make out the sounds quite clearly now.

"Bandits. Prepare, prepare!" The heavily bearded man's terrifying roar immediately woke everyone up. Even many slumbering merchants as well as their carriage drivers were woken up.

These hundred or so mercenaries lined up in an orderly fashion.

"Haha, Big Beard Malone. I didn't expect you to be so alert. You've made some progress over these years. Looks like our ambush failed. We'll have to make a frontal attack then." A loud laugh could be heard, and then a figure dressed in black appeared in front of the caravan.

"It's you?" The heavily bearded man's face changed as he stared at that one-eyed, golden-haired man.

McKinley [Mai'jin'li], the One-Eyed Viper. In this long road which nobody controlled, this name was a very famous one. This person was famed for both his viciousness as well as his power.

“Waaaaa!” An infant in the caravan behind began to cry.

“Bandits!” Many people began to panic.

“QUIET!” The heavily bearded man roared angrily. Many people in the caravan immediately began to arrange themselves in groups, making sure that everyone was together. A number of youngsters armed themselves with weapons, preparing to resist.

The heavily bearded man looked at the one-eyed golden-haired man. “One-Eyed Viper, don’t push things too far. How about this. I’ll offer you five thousand gold coins for you and yours to allow us past. Deal?”

“Five thousand gold coins?” The one-eyed man laughed coldly. “Malone, do you take me, McKinley, to be a beggar? Listen up. A hundred thousand gold coins, and I’ll let you go. Otherwise...hmp.”

The faces of all the mercenaries sank.

A hundred thousand gold coins? Their compensation for this escort mission was only sixty or seventy thousand gold coins. If they were to offer a hundred thousand gold coins, they would be paying out of pocket. After all, according to the mercenary escorting rules, once they accepted an escort mission, even if they had to pay off some bandits, the mercenary company would have to pay out of pocket.

“One-Eyed Viper, don’t go overboard. You should be satisfied to earn 5000 gold without a single man of yours dying.” The heavily bearded man hefted his battleaxe. “Otherwise. We’ll just have to see who is stronger.” Big Beard Malone was quite confident. In the past, he had battled against McKinley, and they were about equal in strength. He believed that with the ambush a failure, McKinley wouldn’t dare to risk everything in an all-out assault.

“That’s how it should be. Brothers, attack!” McKinley shouted in a high voice.

Instantly, all of the bandits drew their weapons and, howling angrily, began to charge. This really did completely shock Malone.

“Swish!” “Swish”! “Swish!”

The archers on both sides began to release their arrows without mercy, but in a small-scale skirmish like this with only a hundred people on each side, archers didn’t have too great an impact on the overall battle.

“Malone, die!” McKinley charged forward, a sharp polearm in his arms. Leaping into the air, with all his might, he delivered a tremendous blow against Malone.

Malone swung his battleaxe upwards, unwilling to show any weakness.

“Thruuum.” The dark aura covering the polearm suddenly dramatically intensified.

“BAM!”

Malone felt his hands grow numb, and he couldn’t help but take a few steps back.

“You...?” Malone stared at McKinley in astonishment. He knew exactly how powerful McKinley was. In terms of frontal assaults, his own weapon held an advantage over McKinley’s. But just then, the opponent had an advantage over him. This...

“Your guess is correct. I’ve already entered the eighth rank as a warrior.” McKinley’s face was filled with arrogance.

“No wonder you weren’t worried about making a frontal assault at all.” Malone now understood.

“Boss, there’s a pretty woman here.” A voice suddenly rang out.

McKinley immediately turned his head and saw Jenne, her face pale from terror and shock. Right now, Jenne was frantically protecting her little brother. The pitiable look on her face was quite stirring indeed.

“Haha, that woman is mine!” McKinley immediately grew excited.

....

The mercenaries were battling against the bandits. A bandit decapitated a mercenary, and then was run through the chest by another mercenary’s sword.

“Retreat, retreat!” Malone bellowed as he quickly retreated. All of his mercenaries retreated with him as well.

“Lord Ley, I beg of you, please rescue our caravan.” Malone said respectfully towards Linley, begging him for aid. Right now, the mercenaries had formed into a circle, with all the merchants and the others inside the ring. Linley and Malone were both located at the outermost layer of the circle.

Faced with Malone’s plea, Linley nodded once.

“I’ll only help you deal with the leader.” Linley said. Malone instantly was so excited that his eyes shone. If McKinley was killed, how could they be afraid of those remaining bandits?

Jenne was tightly holding her younger brother near the campfire.

“Sis, that mercenary captain seems to be begging Lord Ley.” Keane’s eyes were glowing as he watched all of this. Jenne turned to look at Linley as well.

Linley was standing in the middle of the road, calmly looking at the bandits.

“Fuck off!” Wielding his polearm, McKinley charged forward at high speed. He was advancing at an extremely fast speed, and his body was also flickering from left to right, as though he had transformed into two separate figures, making it difficult for one to determine who the real McKinley was, and which was the illusion.

Illusionary Blade!

This was the trademark special skill of McKinley, the One-Eyed Viper!

“How laughable.” Linley, having already reached the level of ‘impose’, held techniques of this level in absolutely no regard at all.

“Die!” A terrifying, ferocious gleam appeared in McKinley’s eye.

Linley drew the adamantine heavy sword from its sheath on his back. This drawing motion carried with it an astonishing, imposing aura, as though all of the space around it had suddenly become frozen.

The adamantine heavy sword chopped towards McKinley in a very simple manner.

McKinley immediately wanted to dodge, but to his terror, he discovered that the space around him seemed to have become suddenly compressed and locked. In that moment, not even sound could escape from the area.

He had nowhere to dodge, and in fact, he couldn't even see anything else. His eye could only watch as the adamantine heavy sword drew closer and closer.

He wanted to raise his polearm to block, but he felt as though he had been mired in an endless pit of quicksand. The polearm felt as though it weighed ten thousand pounds, and was extremely slow.

“Bam!”

The adamantine heavy sword landed against McKinley's body. Suddenly, McKinley's entire body, from head to toe, transformed into meat pulp. The bandits, the mercenaries, Jenne, Keane, and the others all stared in astonishment, their mouths hanging open.

“The rest of those little bandits are for you to handle.” Linley replaced his sword into its sheath as he spoke calmly to Big Beard Malone.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 11, Hands

Under the glow of the campfires, everyone's faces were half-lit, half-shadowed. The smell of blood still infested the area, but now, the men on both sides of the battle only stared in shock at that corpse that had been transformed into a pile of flesh and blood, then at Linley and the adamantine heavy sword he carried.

A combatant of the eighth rank had been killed in one sword stroke...

This...

Was hard to believe!

"My brothers, let's kill these bandits!" Big Beard Malone was the first to react, and he immediately shouted in excitement. "Kill these bastards and avenge our slain comrades!"

Hearing this roar by Big Beard Malone, all of the bandits woke up as well. Their leader, the One-Eyed Viper, McKinley, was killed in one stroke. Even if the mercenaries weren't there, Linley alone could lay waste to them all with that heavy sword.

"Vengeance! Vengeance! Kill!" The mercenaries' eyes were blazing as they were suddenly filled with confidence. One after another charged forward, weapons at the ready.

"Flee, quick!"

The bandits shouted loudly, as they all began to flee, forgetting everything else. The archers of the mercenary company immediately began to nock their bows. Staring coldly at the backs of the fleeing bandits, one sharp arrow was shot out after another. "Swish." "Swish." Six bandits were hit by arrows and fell to the ground.

In the blink of an eye, the seventy or so remaining bandits disappeared into the darkness.

The mercenary company didn't engage in pursuit for too long, chasing after them for only a hundred or so meters before returning. After all, their prime responsibility was to protect the caravan.

"Whew."

The many merchants and travelers in the caravan all sighed in relief. But at this time, the faces of the mercenaries were quite ugly to behold, as they began to collect the corpses of the ten or so comrades who had died.

"Everyone, you can get back to your rest." Malone said loudly.

Quite a few mercenaries had been wounded as well, and had to rest and be treated. Those hundreds of people in the caravan began to calm down, each returning to their own places. As long-time travelers, they often experienced such events, and wouldn't be too shocked or concerned now.

.....

One campfire after another was lit, and the ten or so mercenary corpses were buried within the desolate earth at the sides of the road. Mercenaries who lived by the edges of their blades could die at any time. And once they died, their bodies would all be buried thusly, with the other mercenaries at most bringing some keepsakes of theirs back home for them.

Leaning against a large tree by the roadside with the adamantine heavy sword on his back, Linley quietly watched everyone else.

“Lord Ley.” Many of the caravan merchants ran over, expressing their gratitude towards Linley. Many of them even wanted to give gold coins to Linley as a gift, but Linley respectfully declined them all.

“Brothers, a good journey to you!” Malone roared loudly.

All of the mercenaries present were standing in front of the graves. In unison, they bowed deeply towards the graves. In the lives of these mercenaries, death was a common occurrence. After paying their respects, all of them returned to their normal positions.

The captain of this mercenary company, Big Beard Malone, headed towards Linley with Luther and Lowndes alongside him. Very gratefully, he said, “Lord Ley, thank you. If it wasn’t for you, our mercenary company...” Malone fell silent, shaking his head.

“Ley, thank you so much for saving our mercenary company.” The young Luther said gratefully.

Linley’s initial warning to them as well as his assistance at the end had both been utterly invaluable in saving the mercenary company.

“No need.” Linley said with a calm laugh.

“Lord Ley, here is ten thousand gold coins.” Malone withdrew a magicrystal card from his pockets. “This magicrystal card is an un-bound one, and has ten thousand gold coins within it. Lord Ley, you must accept it. If it wasn’t for you, not only would our mercenary company have failed our mission, we most likely would’ve all died as well.”

Linley shook his head with a laugh.

“Ley, please accept it,” Lowndes immediately urged. Mercenaries were usually quite magnanimous. These people who spent their lives living by the edges of their blades generally held in high regard the codes of valor, brotherhood, and friendship.

“Do I look like someone who needs money to you?” Linley looked at the three of them.

Within his interspatial ring, Linley had twenty two magicrystal cards, each with 100 million gold coins. 2.2 billion gold coins! Even the Dawson Conglomerate wouldn’t be easily persuaded to bring out such a vast fortune at once.

Some of the clans in the Four Great Empires were very powerful and very wealthy, but no matter how powerful they were, they couldn’t compare to the wealth of a royal clan.

After all, those extremely large and powerful clans in the Four Great Empires still had to pay an enormous amount of taxes each year to the Emperor.

By comparison, the ruler of the Kingdom of Fenlai, compared to those major clans, had much more power in his own domain. The wealth that had been built up over thousands of years was a frightening sum indeed.

After hearing Linley's words, Malone was briefly startled, but then didn't press it. He didn't dare to keep squabbling with a powerful combatant such as Linley. And in addition, it truly wasn't easy for his mercenary company to make a living either.

"Captain Malone, go take care of your mercenaries. I see that quite a number of them suffered serious injuries." Linley said.

"Then Lord Ley, I leave you to your rest. I'll take my leave now." Malone said respectfully. Powerful combatants were treated with respect no matter where they were.

The campfires blazed. Many of the people in the caravan weren't able to fall asleep. Many of them hunched over campfires. Aside from a minority who had managed to fall asleep, most were talking about what had just happened. Every so often, glances would be sneaked towards Linley. Clearly, the topic of their conversation was Linley.

Right now, Linley was seated cross-legged, attuning himself to the vast, boundless earth, as well as the wind which spanned the skies.

After having spent three years training in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, Linley had learned quite a bit about the proper way of training. Both warriors and magi, in the end, had to learn how to understand and become attuned to nature.

For example, just now, both Linley and McKinley were warriors of the eighth rank.

But in terms of true understanding, McKinley was still on the most basic level of attack, while Linley had already reached the third level, and was able to 'impose' in battle. This 'imposing power' was the power to impose upon the heavens and the earth to constrain his enemies. When he struck out with his sword, he had disrupted the entire surrounding space.

The difference between the two of them was too great. For him to be killed in a single stroke wasn't strange at all.

"If I had not trained within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and forgot about everything besides training for three years, no matter how long I stayed in Hess City, I probably wouldn't have been able to rise to another level of understanding." Linley mused to himself.

Many of the people in the caravan were discussing Linley, but Linley didn't pay any attention to them as he quietly meditated.

"Ley, Lord Ley?" A nervous voice rang out next to Linley.

Hearing this voice, Linley turned around. It was that young nobleman, who was standing up as straight as a ramrod. Keane. A hint of a smile appeared on Linley's face. "Keane. Right? What is it?"

Hearing Linley call him by his name, Keane felt very proud. He said quietly, "Lord Ley, I have a request."

"Sit first, then talk."

Linley's attitude made Keane relax just a little, and he sat down next to Linley. His eyes filled with worship, he said to Linley, "Lord Ley, just then, your sword blow was so powerful. I've been bullied ever since I was a kid. I want to be a powerful warrior as well. Can you teach me?"

Linley was startled.

Warrior training wasn't a matter of just a few days. It required many years of accumulated hard work, as well as good natural talent. It also required good instructors. Only when all three criteria were fulfilled could a powerful combatant be produced.

"That's a bit difficult, and I don't have enough time to train you." Linley laughed.

Keane hurriedly nodded, waving his hands frantically. "No, Lord Ley, I don't need to learn too much. I don't need to be too powerful. I just want to learn that sword stroke you used just now. Just that one sword stroke." As he spoke, Keane even pantomimed the actual sword blow.

"Just that one sword stroke?" Linley didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

Although that sword stroke of his had seemed easy, it had required over ten years of hard training as well as changes to both his mind and spirit. Only then was he able to understand this 'impose' level. Not even most warriors of the ninth rank were able to grasp any level of 'impose', much less those of the eighth rank.

According to the Baruch clan's records, that ancestor who wielded the heavy warhammer, upon reaching the Saint-level, was still only capable of reaching the level of 'wielding something heavy as though it were light'. Only after being at the Saint-level for more than ten years did the ancestor begin to understand how to 'impose'.

Magi found it naturally easier than warriors to become one with nature.

For a pure warrior to truly understand and comprehend 'impose' was far more difficult than a dual-class combatant such as Linley, who was both magus and warrior.

"Is it very....very hard? I'm not afraid." Keane said.

"Keane." A gentle voice called out, and Jenne rushed over, dressed in light blue and holding some clothes in her hands. She said towards Keane with concern, "The night is growing cold. Bundle up."

Keane pouted, shaking his head. "No."

Jenne couldn't help but frown, but there was nothing she could do.

Keane continued, "Big sis, look, Lord Ley is only wearing a thin shirt. I'm already wearing a lot, and you want me to wear even more?"

Linley couldn't help but let out an unexpected laugh. This Keane was actually comparing himself to him? Even in the most freezing of winters, Linley wouldn't feel cold, much less now.

"Keane, bundle up." Linley said.

Linley's words seemed to have more of an effect than Jenne's. "Oh." Keane accepted the clothes from Jenne, then put them on. Jenne gratefully looked at Linley. "Thank you, Lord Ley."

Linley smiled and nodded.

As Jenne and Linley exchanged glances, Jenne immediately blushed red slightly.

But Linley, quite by accident, noticed Jenne's hands. When he saw them, he was quite surprised. From what Linley could tell, Jenne was without question a young noble lady, but Jenne's hands seemed rather coarse.

"Keane, don't disturb Lord Ley for too long. Lord Ley needs to rest as well." Jenne smiled apologetically towards Linley, and then she went back to her own carriage, face still slightly red.

Linley looked at Keane.

“Keane, does your sister often do chores at home?” Linley was very curious. Most noble ladies had hands that were extremely tender and soft. In terms of both bearing as well as clothing, Jenne was definitely a noble lady, but her hands...

Keane nodded. “Right. Lord Ley, you probably can’t tell from the way I’ve dressed, but I feel really awkward in these clothes. It’s been a long time since I’ve dressed this formally.” Keane tugged at his collar. “Actually, my sister and I were living in an ordinary mountain village. Only Grandpa Lambert was there to take care of us. Big sis usually had to do most of our family chores.”

“Oh?” Linley was beginning to grow curious. “But your sister’s demeanor doesn’t seem like that of an ordinary village girl.”

Keane nodded. “Of course. Our father was the governor of a prefecture-level city and had an exceedingly high social status. When we were young, we stayed in the governor’s mansion. But when I was six, my mother, my sister, and myself were forced out by our aunt. Thus, my mother took my sister and I back to her home. My big sis, when she was young, received all the education that a young noble lady should have, and when we left our father’s home, she was already ten. So she naturally continued to maintain the noble customs which had already become ingrained within her. But I was young, and my mother was never in good health. Grandpa Lambert couldn’t take care of both of us by himself, so big sis often had to do housework. Big sis can do anything!”

“I remember in the heart of winter, big sis’ hands had begun to split from the cold, but she’d still cook for me. I wanted to help, but she wouldn’t let me.” Keane bit his lips, eyes starting to turn red. “This time, when I take over the position of city governor, I definitely won’t let big sis do any more chores. I’m going to let a huge number of servants take care of sis.”

Hearing this story, Linley couldn’t help but admire this Jenne, who outwardly looked so fragile and so shy.

“You are going to take over the position of city governor? Didn’t your aunt expel you though?” Linley asked.

Keane didn’t hide anything. “At first, my aunt used every method available to her to make us leave, so as to guarantee that her son would be the next city governor. Unfortunately...that garbage son of hers did nothing but drink and fool around. Immediately after my father died, that piece of trash felt delighted as he had nothing to fear now, and became even more dissolute. From what I heard, not too long ago, he died in the arms of some woman. After he died, naturally the position of city governor falls to me.”

Keane looked at Linley with excitement. “Lord Ley, please teach me. Once I become city governor, I’ll definitely give you a really, really high position!”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 12, Blackrock City

Right. A kid who had lived in a small village after the age of six would naturally be very innocent. Linley felt that Jenne was quite innocent as well.

Through that short conversation, Linley had already learned a great deal about this little fellow, Keane.

At the same time, Linley more or less also understood what was going on with him and his sister.

“Assume the position of city governor? I’m afraid it won’t be that easy.” Linley thought to himself. Compared to these two innocent siblings, Linley could see much more deeply.

The highest level of city in the O’Brien Empire was the imperial capital, followed by the provincial capitals of the seven provinces. Beneath the level of the provincial capitals were the prefectural cities, then ordinary cities, and then countryside villages.

The status of a governor of a prefectural city was actually quite high.

How could the position of governor of a prefectural city be so easily acquired by an innocent countryside-raised child?

.....

After training the entire night, when Linley next opened his eyes, it was already dawn.

“Lord Ley, by nightfall tonight, we should be at the border cities of the Empire.” Lowndes chortled. “Lord Ley, let’s eat breakfast together.”

“Alright.”

Linley and Bebe headed over to them. As for Haeru...the food there wasn’t nearly enough for him. Late last night, Haeru had entered the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and only returned after having eaten a good, full meal.

Within a carriage not too far away from Linley.

“Sis, I’ll get off first.” Keane happily hopped off the carriage.

Lambert looked at Keane, who had not a care in the world. He shook his head mentally, and then looked at Jenne. Lambert knew very well how innocent and how kind Jenne was.

“Miss, don’t rush off just yet.” Lambert squeezed out a smile.

“Grandpa Lambert, what is it?” Jenne looked questioningly at Lambert with her big eyes.

Lambert said, “Miss, you saw as well how we met with bandits on the way. When we reach the border cities, we’ll have to separate from the caravan. By then, I, an old man, along with you and the young master will be all alone on the road. If we meet with any bandits on the way, I might not be able to overcome them.”

Jenne couldn't help but to think back to that bloody scene of attacking bandits from the previous night.

"Right. Then what should we do?" Jenne was a bit nervous.

Lambert laughed. "Miss, didn't you notice that Lord Ley? Even the leader of those bandits was killed by Lord Ley with a single sword stroke. As long as Lord Ley is willing to protect you, you definitely won't be in any danger."

Jenne was eighteen years old, after all. She wasn't as irresponsible as Keane.

"Grandpa Lambert, if I try to invite a powerful combatant like that to assist us, do you think he will agree?" Jenne looked at Lambert.

Lambert laughed encouragingly. "Don't worry. Just tell him that you and Keane are the children of the governor of the prefectural city of Cerre [Chi'er], and that this time you are returning for the purpose of Keane assuming the governorship. If he can guard you on your way back, once you arrive at Cerre, you will definitely thank and reward him heavily. Remember...don't tell him too much. Don't tell him that in the past, you were living in a small village. Just tell him what I told you now."

Lambert knew very well that if Linley became aware of the details of their situation, he probably wouldn't agree.

"Oh."

Jenne didn't even notice that there were some slight differences between the truth and what Lambert had just instructed her to say.

"Go, and remember what I told you. Act sincerely." Lambert encouraged.

"Okay." Jenne nodded. Taking a deep breath, she summoned her courage and descended from the carriage.

Watching Jenne leave the carriage, Lambert secretly sighed. "Alas. Madame, even on your death bed, you weren't willing to swallow your anger. You insisted on having Jenne and Keane go assume the position of city governor. Lord Count Wade [Wei'de] is already dead, but the senior madame probably won't so easily allow Keane to assume the position of governor."

"If we had a combatant of the ninth rank protecting us though, then we will have a good chance." Late at night, Lambert had heard others whisper that McKinley had already reached the eighth rank as a warrior. But Linley had been able to easily kill him in one blow. As Lambert saw it, Linley should therefore be a warrior of the ninth rank.

.....

The wind was blowing. After eating to his content, Linley was relaxing comfortably for now, as they would depart again soon.

"The O'Brien Empire. Mm. We should be there tomorrow." Linley was reclining on his cart, lazily awaiting their departure. But right at this moment, from the corner of his eyes, Linley suddenly saw someone approaching.

"Jenne?" Linley sat up curiously.

Somewhat cautiously, Jenne was walking over to him. Seeing Linley sit up and look at her, Jenne forced out a small smile. "Lord Ley, hello."

“Miss Jenne, hello.” Linley was a bit confused. Why had this Miss Jenne come?

Jenne just stood there hesitantly for a moment, not knowing how to start.

“Miss Jenne, is there something I can help you with?” Linley asked preemptively.

Jenne’s face turned slightly red. Clearly, she was very nervous. “Lord Ley, it’s like this. My younger brother and I are journeying to my father’s prefectural city. My younger brother is going to assume the position of city governor. But we’re afraid that the journey to the city will be dangerous. Therefore, we were hoping...hoping to ask you, Lord Ley, to protect us.”

Getting this all out in one breath, Jenne began to stammer a bit.

Linley had a basic understanding of the general geography of the O’Brien Empire. His younger brother, Wharton, was in the southernmost administrative province of the O’Brien Empire, known as the O’Brien Administrative Province.

Linley himself currently was in the Northwest Administrative Province of the O’Brien Empire.

From the northwest province to the southernmost province was a journey that would most likely take a year and a half or so. But of course, if Linley hurried along the way by riding on the Blackcloud Panther, he could cross a thousand kilometers per day and arrive within ten days.

But Linley was in no rush.

His younger brother was in school at the O’Brien Academy. Why the need to rush over there? Right now, the most important thing for him was training and raising his own strength as much as possible.

“Protect you? For how long?” Linley asked with a laugh.

“Not too long,” Jenne hurriedly said. “The city of Cerre is in the Northwest Administrative Province. From here to there, it should only take us around ten days or half a month or so. When we get there, I will definitely thank you and reward you heavily.”

“Thank and reward me?”

Linley was sighing to himself. Based on Linley’s experience, he knew very well, how could the position of city governor of a prefectural city be so easily taken by a pair of innocent siblings who had no powerful backers at all?

“We’ll give you lots of gold coins.” Jenne looked hopefully at Linley.

Jokingly, Linley said, “Oh? How many gold coins?”

Jenne gritted her teeth. “Ten thousand gold coins? What do you think?” Jenne had been living in the village since she was ten. Normally speaking, one or two gold coins could last for quite a while in a place like that. She knew that the prefectural city was a wealthy place, and she believed that although ten thousand gold coins was an astronomical figure, the prefectural city should be able to support it.

“Ten thousand gold coins?”

That previous night, the mercenary captain had wanted to offer Linley ten thousand gold coins as a token of his thanks as well. But frankly, even aside from the wealth in Linley’s interspatial ring, each of Linley’s sculptures, given his status as a master sculptor, would be worth over a hundred thousand gold coins.

“Is that not enough?” Jenne stuttered.

Linley looked at Jenne. “Miss Jenne, generally speaking, how much did you and Keane spend each year in the village?”

“In the village?” Jenne was startled. Lambert had just instructed her repeatedly not to say that in the past she had lived in a village, but Linley had already known about it.

Jenne said honestly, “A few dozen gold coins each year. After all, we had to pay for my mother’s medical treatment. Right. Lord Ley, I don’t have that much money on me right now, but in the future, I will.”

Linley had to admit that she really was an innocent girl.

“So, um, actually, you know, it should be fairly safe inside the Empire’s borders. Grandpa Lambert probably was just over-thinking things. Um. I should leave.” Jenne felt rather awkward, and began to just blurt out random things.

“No. I just wanted to ask, right now, how many gold coins can you pay up front?” Linley asked.

After hearing that her prefectural city was in the Northwest Administrative Province, Linley had already made up his mind to help them, as it was on the way for him. After all, he was going to pass through the Northwest Administrative Province enroute to the O’Brien Administrative Province.

“Right now? I have around ten gold coins on me.” Jenne withdrew a small pouch in her purse. “Uncle Lambert has a few more coins on him also.”

Linley accepted the pouch, retrieving a single gold coin from it.

“Done.” Linley placed this gold coin into his own pouch. “From this moment forward, I’ve accepted this escort mission. But of course, this gold coin is just your down payment. When your younger brother becomes the city governor, I’ll collect the remaining 9999 gold coins.”

Jenne was wildly overjoyed at her success.

“Thank you, thank you.” Jenne was so excited that her little face turned pure scarlet.

.....

The caravan began to move forward once more, and the Blackcloud Panther once more began to lope alongside Linley’s cart. At the same time, Haeru looked suspiciously at Bebe and growled, “Bebe. Master accepted an escort mission for just ten thousand gold coins?”

Even a hundred thousand gold coins wouldn’t be enough to invite an expert like Linley to help out.

Just by killing a magical beast of the eighth rank, Linley would be able to procure a magicite core of the eighth rank that was worth 500,000 gold coins. Generally speaking, it was difficult for combatants of the eighth rank to kill magical beasts of the eighth rank. Only combatants of the ninth rank were able to kill magical beasts with confidence.

“Haeru, what do you know? The Boss is being benevolent, get it?” Bebe growled back to the Blackcloud Panther.

Growling to each other, the two magical beasts conversed in the language of magical beasts. Seeing them chatting to each other, Linley chuckled, continuing to sit quietly in the cart.

“Squeak, squeak.”

The cart’s wheels rhythmically squeaked, constantly moving forward. By the time the sun went down past the mountains, this caravan finally arrived at a border city of the O’Brien Empire.

Riding on the cart, Linley’s body swayed back and forth as he watched the distant city grow closer.

This was a pitch-black city that looked as if it were an enormous magical beast that had taken the land for itself. The walls of the cities were over thirty meters tall. Only powerful combatants would be able to scale such heights.

“Blackrock City. The ‘wall’ of the O’Brien Empire in the Northwest Administrative Province.” Linley had long since heard of this famous city.

Historically, there were quite a few major battles that had been fought at Blackrock City. Although many years had passed by, when they drew near Blackrock City, they could still see the dark red color staining many of the enormous black stones making up the walls of the city. These were dried bloodstains that had accumulated over countless years and battles.

“Everyone, we’ll part ways here.” Malone shouted loudly from outside the city walls.

Based on their mission requirements, their mercenary company was only responsible for delivering the caravan to this location. Immediately, the various merchants and travelers began to drive their carriages or carry their bags towards the city gates.

“Big brother Ley!” Keane called out from his carriage.

On the journey over, Keane had learned that Linley was going to escort them. Immediately, he grew even closer to Linley, and Linley, in turn, told Keane to just address him as ‘big brother’. After all, Linley was only 21 years old.

“Let’s go together.”

Linley led his two-meter tall, four-meter long black panther directly towards the city gates. The previously lazy-looking guard, seeing Linley’s black panther, was so scared that he immediately took a few steps back.

Panther-type, tiger-type, and lion-type magical beasts were all high-class magical beasts. Even the weakest panther-type magical beasts and lion-type magical beasts were generally of the seventh rank.

Right now, in a time of peace, the security at the gates wasn’t too strict.

The gate guards didn’t even inspect Linley, directly allowing him entrance.

“My heavens, what rank of magical beast is that black panther? When it looked at me, my heart almost stopped from fear.” A gate guard cried out loudly in fear.

An older gate guard next to him lowered his voice and said, “Lower your voice. From what I know, the weakest type of panther, the Golden Tattooed Panther, is a magical beast of the seventh rank. This black panther is at least a magical beast of the eighth rank.”

....

“Wow! Blackrock City is so developed!” Keane’s eyes were shining.

On the main streets of Blackrock City, Linley, Keane, and Jenne were walking side by side. Jenne was wearing a peaked cap on her head, pressed down firmly and with a veil in front of her face. After all, Jenne's beauty could cause a great deal of trouble.

"He thinks THIS is developed?" Bebe squeaked on Linley's shoulders.

Blackrock City was a city meant for war. Although it was fairly developed due to traders, there was no way it could compare to the now-lost Holy Capital, Fenlai City. Even when compared to Hess City, the capital of a kingdom, there was quite a big difference.

"Careful." Linley's body suddenly turned into a blur as he flashed in front of Jenne and Keane.

"Swish." "Swish."

With a wave of his right hand, Linley snatched two arrows out of the air.

"You think you can run?" With a wave of his hands, Linley sent the two arrows going back the way they came, piercing through the throats of the two distant men who were preparing to flee.

"Urk..."

Those two men clutched their throats in shock, and then collapsed, dead.

"Ah!" The previously calm street began filled with screams, and many people began to run about in a panic. "Let's go." Linley said to the stunned Jenne and Keane.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 13, Persuasion

“Move, now!” That old servant, Lambert, reacted quickly as well, immediately urging them to leave.

Totally baffled and confused, Jenne and Keane were tugged by Lambert and Linley away from this area. After all, given that people had just been killed on the streets, the city guard would soon arrive.

Linley wasn’t afraid of the guards, but dealing with guards while also escorting Jenne was an extremely annoying task.

Aside from Linley and his group, many others around them were running away and fleeing wildly as well.

It was nightfall, and it should have been the most bustling time for this major road in Blackrock City, but in the blink of an eye, this part of the road became totally deserted. Nobody was within a hundred meters of those two corpses.

“Captain, what should we do?”

Seated next to a window within a private room in a hotel, two men were staring down at the scene below. One of them had long red hair, with a face that looked as though it had been carved with a knife. But right now, he had a sinister look on his face as he listened to the nearby subordinate query him.

“I didn’t expect these two country bumpkin siblings to have such a powerful helper.” The red-haired man said coldly.

“Captain, that man even has a black panther. Panthers are all high-class magical beasts. For the likes of us to deal with such a powerful combatant...will be difficult.” A burly, broad-chested man beside the captain said in a quiet voice.

The red-haired man was frustrated as well.

Per the orders of the senior madame, they came to kill these two bumpkin siblings. Per their intelligence, only the old servant with these two bumpkins posed any threat. But he was only a warrior of the sixth rank. In the O’Brien Empire, which was filled with experts, a combatant of the sixth rank was nothing.

Perhaps in some villages, a warrior of the sixth rank was powerful. But the leader of this squad which had been sent out per the senior madame’s orders was himself a warrior of the seventh rank.

“A black panther...why haven’t I ever seen this type of panther before?” The red-haired man was frowning. As an expert of the seventh level, he knew quite a bit about magical beasts.

Panther-type magical beasts included the Golden Tattooed Panther, the Blackstripe Panther, and others.

But this black panther with wavy black stripes was something he had never seen.

“That brown-haired man is clearly the master of this black panther. He is, at the very least, a combatant of the eighth rank.” The red-haired man thought back to the scene of Linley suddenly snatching the arrows out of the air, and as he did, he shivered.

Arrows moved at an extremely high speed.

To be able to react and immediately move in front of Jenne and Keane, and then snatch the two arrows out of the air was something even most warriors of the eighth rank couldn't do.

"Captain?" The burly man next to him asked quietly.

The red-haired man turned to look at him. In a cold voice, he said, "Hmph. That brown-haired man is extremely powerful. For this mission, we can't fight them head on. Arrange for some people to keep watch on them secretly. I refuse to believe that expert will neither eat nor sleep. He can't always be together with those two siblings."

"As soon as that brown-haired man and those two are separated, immediately have our men kill the two." The red-haired man issued his order.

"Yes, Captain!" The burly man nodded and immediately left the room.

The red-haired man turned his head back, once more staring below through the window. Those two corpses still lay on the street with the arrows through their throats. The mounted city guards were just now rushing over.

.....

On the second floor of an ordinary hotel in Blackstone City, Linley, Jenne, Keane, and Lambert were seated in a private room. Even Bebe had a seat of his own. As for Haeru, he was lying down on the ground, his eyes contentedly half-shut.

Right now, Jenne and Keane's faces were both still rather pale.

"Just...just now, I was so scared." Keane's eyes were still filled with terror.

Ever since he was young, Keane had lived in a countryside village. The most violent struggles he had ever seen were just some of the young men getting into serious fights with each other. How could he ever have experienced something like what he just saw?

Although on the road here, they had suffered a bandit attack, the bandits were fighting against the mercenaries, and hadn't harmed them yet. But this time, the opponents had come for his life and his sister's life.

Jenne's eyes were filled with a hint of terror as well.

"Jenne, Keane, don't be afraid." Linley laughed as he consoled them.

To Linley, a small event like this couldn't even impact his mood at all. In the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, he was constantly on guard for magical beasts laying in ambush for him.

And thus, within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, Linley learned how to keep his heart as tranquil as water, come what may. How could a small event like this disturb him?

"Young master, young miss." Lambert consoled as well. "We're fine now. Don't worry. Fortunately, we had Lord Ley with us today. Otherwise, things would have been terrible. Young master, young miss, you absolutely must offer your thanks to Lord Ley."

Only now did Jenne and Keane recover from their panic.

“Big brother Ley, we really owe you our thanks this time.” Keane said gratefully, and his eyes were glowing. “Big brother Ley, just now, you waved your hand and snatched the two arrows out of the air, and then with another wave...those two guys were dead.” Keane was indeed a child. In his excitement, he had totally forgotten his fear.

Jenne looked gratefully at Linley as well. “Thank you, big brother Ley.”

Towards Linley, Jenne felt gratitude from the bottom of her heart.

That first time she had seen Linley, Jenne had felt that he was a mysterious, powerful expert, an amazing person who commanded a mighty magical beast as well.

In particular, when Linley had agreed to escort and protect them, he had only taken a single gold coin. Although Linley said that he would collect the other 9999 when Keane became the city governor, Jenne, being an eighteen year old adult, knew when someone was acting out of kindness.

“No need for thanks. I agreed to protect you. This is nothing more than what I’m supposed to do.” Linley frowned. “What’s going on though? As soon as you entered Blackrock City, people tried to assassinate you? Who exactly have you offended?”

Keane was instantly baffled.

Jenne was confused as well. “I...I haven’t offended anyone.”

“Then who has enmity with you two?” Linley continued to ask.

Jenne was quiet for a moment, then said, “Right, if we talk about enmity, perhaps the only one with enmity towards us is my aunt.” Right at this moment, the old servant, Lambert, immediately interrupted their conversation. Laughing towards Linley, he said, “We don’t have any enemies. Their aunt just has some disagreements with them, that’s all. Lord Ley, no need to worry about these annoying things. Let’s all eat.”

Linley glanced at Lambert, then laughed and nodded. “Fine, let’s all eat.”

In truth, ever since Keane had told Linley about himself and his sister, Linley had a rough idea as to what was going on. This assassination attempt showed that clearly, it was because the main wife of the departed city governor didn’t wish for Jenne and Keane to assume the position of city governor.

But Linley didn’t say these things openly.

.....

That very night, the two siblings, Lambert, and Linley each retired to their own rooms. They had reserved a private, stand-alone villa.

Darkness descended.

Linley’s room was totally dark. Linley sat cross-legged on his bed, his heart totally calm as he quietly attuned with the throbbing pulse of the world and the flows of the wind.

Occasionally, when Linley had some insights, he would rise to his feet and casually swing his heavy sword.

....

“Squeak.” Dressed in her sleeping clothes and her long hair unbound, Jenne walked towards the room of her old servant, Lambert. “Grandpa Lambert, are you sleeping yet?”

The door opened very quickly.

“Miss, quick, come in.” Lambert immediately opened the door for Jenne, then closed it after Jenne entered his room.

“Miss, what is it?” Lambert asked.

Jenne stared at Lambert. “Grandpa Lambert, tell me. Why does someone want to kill me and my younger brother? Is it my aunt?”

“Why would you think such a thing?” Lambert’s heart trembled.

Jenne said stubbornly, “Grandpa Lambert, don’t treat me like a little kid. The day my younger brother and I left the village, I thought we would be making a joyful return as we went to assume the position of city governor. But now, I understand. Aunt and her people won’t allow us to take the position over. The people who tried to kill us just now definitely were acting on her behalf. I can’t think of anyone else.”

Lambert looked at Jenne and let out a long sigh.

“Fine, miss. I admit, your suspicions are correct.” Lambert said resignedly.

Jenne started.

“So it really is...” Jenne murmured.

Jenne look at Lambert. “Grandpa Lambert, why didn’t you tell me and my younger brother from the start?”

“Sigh.” Lambert shook his head. “What would be the point? Even on her death’s bed, your mother couldn’t let go of this grievance. She insisted on having you and your little brother go take over the governor’s position. I know that given your temperament, you wouldn’t go against your mother’s dying wish.”

“Right. I’ll carry it out, even if it costs me my life.” Jenne nodded stubbornly.

“Since this is the case, it was better to let the two of you travel happily. In addition, I was trying to come up with ways to protect you two as well. If we hadn’t encountered Lord Ley, I would’ve come up with other ideas here in Blackrock City, so as to allow you two to safely reach Cerre City.” Lambert said honestly.

Living in the village, Jenne and Keane’s lives weren’t happy at all.

The nobles of the village all lusted after Jenne’s beauty, while Keane was often bullied as well. Even if Jenne and Keane had known how dangerous this journey would be, they still would’ve made this trip.

After all, once Keane assumed the governorship, his destiny would be totally transformed.

“Grandpa Lambert, will this trip be very dangerous?” Jenne had a very complex look on her face.

Lambert let out a deep sigh. “Originally, I didn’t think it would be too dangerous, but now, it seems as though that aunt of yours has really made up her mind to be vicious. She’s arranged for assassins as far away as Blackrock City. Most likely, the road to Cerre City will be very dangerous after all.”

“Then, Grandpa Lambert, why didn’t you explain clearly to big brother Ley?” Jenne stared at Lambert.

“We can’t.” Lambert shook his head. “After your father died, your aunt virtually took total control over Cerre City. She has quite a few experts under her control. If you openly ask your big brother Ley to fight

against the power controlling a prefectural city, I'm afraid that he won't do so for the sake of you and your brother. After all, it is extremely dangerous."

The real power controlling a prefectural city possessed an astonishing amount of power.

Such a power should have several combatants of the eighth rank. Of course, combatants of the ninth rank weren't very likely. Even one would be astonishing. After all, combatants of the ninth rank usually served the managing clan of an entire Administrative Province, or the Emperor himself. To serve a governor of a prefectural city...unlikely.

However, assassins didn't have to rely solely on brute force. Poison, traps...all of these were possible.

"Very dangerous?" Jenne paused for a moment. "Grandpa Lambert, get some rest." As she spoke, Jenne left Lambert's room.

But after leaving Lambert's room, Jenne didn't immediately go back to her own. Rather...she headed for Linley's.

"Knock, knock, knock." Three raps on the door.

"Come in." Linley's voice rang out, while a lantern was lit inside the room.

Jenne pushed the door open and entered.

Linley left his bed and took a seat on his chair. Smiling, he said, "Miss Jenne, it's very late. Is there something you need?"

"Big brother Ley." Jenne sat down. Taking a deep breath, she mustered up all her courage and said to Linley, "Big brother Ley, I have to tell you something."

"What is that?" Linley looked at Jenne.

Jenne said apologetically, "Actually, Keane and I have been living in a countryside village this entire time, and it has been a long time since we had seen our father. We aren't familiar at all with Cerre City, and we might not be successful in our attempt to take over the governorship of the city."

Jenne really was an extremely compassionate girl. Knowing how dangerous it was, she decided that she didn't want Linley to suffer these risks alongside them.

"Oh." Linley only said this in response.

But in his heart, Linley sighed to himself. This Jenne really was a pure, innocent girl.

Seeing Linley's reaction, Jenne thought that Linley didn't understand. She hurriedly explained, "Big brother Ley, originally, with regards to assuming the governorship, my thought was that either we would succeed, or we would fail and go home. But it looks like it won't be that simple. There are people out to kill us, and most likely, they were sent by our aunt. In the future, she'll probably use even more vicious means against us. If you stay by our side, it will be dangerous for you too."

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 14, Repeated Assassination Attempts

“Very dangerous?” Linley began to laugh. “How dangerous, exactly?”

Seeing Linley’s reaction, Jenne couldn’t help but nod frantically. “Extremely dangerous. My aunt is currently in control of Cerre City, and her authority is on par with that of a city governor right now.”

Jenne said somewhat awkwardly, “Big brother Ley, I am so sorry. I didn’t tell you these things earlier. There’s no need for you to risk yourself for me. It isn’t worth it.”

“Haha...”

Linley laughed. “Not worth it? I don’t have anything else to do right now either. Escorting you along the way is just a matter of course. As far as the ‘danger’ is concerned? I have a much better understanding than you of whether or not it will be dangerous. Alright, Jenne, go back and get some rest.”

“Big brother Ley.” Jenne stared at Linley, somewhat stunned.

“Go back.” Linley said with a faint smile.

Jenne cast a grateful glance at Linley. “Thank you, big brother Ley.” But then, Jenne looked solemnly at him. “However, big brother Ley, I really don’t want you to risk yourself for my sake.”

“Go back to sleep.” Linley intentionally hardened his face, ‘barking’ at her.

“Oh.” Like a scolded child, Jenne nodded obediently, then turned and left via the door. Actually, in her heart, Jenne was feeling quite happy right now. She was, after all, an eighteen year old child. When such a girl saw such an outstanding young man treat her so well, of course the girl would feel happy. Jenne didn’t truly want to separate from Linley.

After walking outside the door, Jenne suddenly turned her head.

Jenne smiled beautifully. “Big brother Ley, when you harden your face like that, you look really grim and scary.” And then, like a playful child, Jenne fled down and away from Linley’s room.

Watching her flee, Linley didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry.

Taking a deep breath, Linley calmed himself down, then returned to his bed, quietly seating himself in the meditative position as he began to train his spirit. No matter when or where he was, Linley would always seize every possible moment for training.

Linley would never forget about seeking vengeance for his parents.

Could never forget about the death of Grandpa Doehring!

Could never forget that right now, he had a goal set for himself – Destroying the entire Radiant Church, root and stem!

“There will come a day...” Linley’s resolve was extremely firm. Right now, he desired neither authority nor status. All he wanted was to be able to train in peace.

.....

In another stand-alone residence facing this hotel complex, there was a room where a lamp had been lit the entire night. The grim red-haired man sat alone in that room, six others surrounding him.

“If we succeed with this initiative, everyone will benefit. But if we fail...you all know how cruel Madame Wade can be.” The red-haired man said calmly.

The six men’s hearts were all filled with fear.

Madame Wade was heartless and vicious. When Count Wade had been alive, virtually everyone in Cerre City knew that although Count Wade was the city governor in name, in reality, the true governor was Madame Wade.

Even Madame Wade’s son always felt frightened and cold when facing her.

Unfortunately, her son was dead now.

Per the rules, the successor to Count Wade as city governor should be his son. But how could Madame Wade so easily allow those two countryside-dwelling siblings to take the position?

“Captain, don’t worry. We definitely won’t fail this time. Although that expert is very powerful, he can’t always be protecting them.” One of the six men said with force and determination.

The others all nodded as well.

“Fine. I’ve already arranged for this hotel’s owner to be bribed. On the third floor of the hotel, there are two rooms which are facing the siblings’ residence. When the time comes, the four of you shall take up those two rooms. The other two will come with me. Remember, we will make our move as soon as we see the opportunity to, but our primary target is the boy.” The red-haired man reminded.

After all, right now, Keane was the first in line for succession.

Jenne was a girl. It would be much harder for her to become the city governor.

“When the boy comes out, we move. After killing him, if we have the chance, we can kill the girl as well.” The red-haired man said coldly. “Alright. Let’s go wait. Perhaps the boy will need to make a trip to the bathroom at night. That will allow us to complete our mission easily.”

“Yes, Captain!”

Per the red-haired man’s orders, four of the six men immediately left the residence, heading directly for the hotel and for the two rooms on the third floor that had been prepared.

A curved moon was hanging in the sky tonight, and moonlight cast a gentle glow upon the world.

The archers that the red-haired man had brought on this trip were the elite archers of Cerre City. They should have been able to easily shoot a weak, unprepared boy from the distance of fifty or sixty meters.

“Captain, what should we do?” The other two men asked, standing by the red-haired man’s side.

The red-haired man said calmly, "Your mission is...if those four do not have a chance to kill the boy, dress up as hotel attendants and deliver breakfast to them. When you near the boy, immediately kill him with one hit."

"Captain!" The two immediately became frantic.

Order them to dress as attendants to go assassinate the boy? But that powerful combatant with the black panther companion was right there. Even if they succeeded, would they be able to survive?

"Hmph."

The red-haired man looked coldly at them. "The two of you have no options. When the eight of you came with me, your families were all taken into custody by Madame Wade. Once your mission fails, not only will you be doomed, your families are finished as well. But if you succeed, even if you die, your families will be treated well."

Both men's faces turned white.

"The two of you should know what type of person Madame Wade is, and what type of person I am." The red-haired man said mercilessly.

Although this red-haired man was nominally their captain, in reality, he was nothing more than Madame Wade's loyal hound. He was merciless when killing people.

"But of course, if the other four succeed, then there'll be no need for the two of you to risk your lives." The red-haired man said calmly, "Right now, you two should pray. Pray that the War God blesses you."

Both of them were silent.

They were so-called 'elite' soldiers from the army. But how could small figures like them possibly struggle against Madame Wade? And what's more, the red-haired man was keeping his eyes on them.

.....

Right now, there were four archers based in the third floor of the hotel. All of them were lying in ambush in their separate rooms. In each room, one was resting, while another was on watch. They had to stay in top condition, and once Keane stepped out, they would immediately awaken the other person.

The night slowly passed on.

This night, Keane didn't take a single step out of his room. The sky began to brighten, and the fresh morning air freshened the minds of the four archers considerably.

"Squeak."

The door opened.

"He's coming out." The archers on watch in each room reminded their partners.

The four archers in the two rooms all felt their heart-rates speed up. All of them secretly looked out the window in the direction of Jenne and Keane's residence.

"It's the girl. Don't be impatient. Wait." The archers were waiting quietly.

.....

Pushing the door open, Jenne's face was wreathed in smiles. After knowing that Linley wouldn't leave and would continue to protect them, although she knew the path ahead was still perilous, Jenne still felt very happy.

"Ah. What nice, fresh air." Jenne closed her eyes, taking a deep breath of the fresh morning air.

And then, Jenne began to walk in the direction of her younger brother's room. In a clear voice, she called out, "Keane, time to get out of bed. Don't be lazy-a-bed'." As she spoke, Jenne knocked on the door.

Hearing Jenne's voice, Linley opened his eyes, ending his training. As for Haeru, Linley's Blackcloud Panther who was sleeping at the foot of Linley's bed, he didn't even bother to open his eyes.

....

Still wearing his sleepwear, Keane opened his door. Rubbing his eyes sleepily, he muttered, "Sis, why are we getting up so early? I haven't woken up yet. It's been a long time since I've had a good sleep."

Right at this moment, the eyes of the archers in the third floor of the hotel lit up.

"Target acquired."

The four archers simultaneously nocked their bows, preparing to fire.

.....

"Young miss, young master. You two have gotten up quite early." The old servant, Lambert, pushed his door open as well.

"Good morning, Grandpa Lambert." Jenne said warmly.

Keane just pouted, still rubbing at his eyes. "Grandpa Lambert, it isn't that I got up early, it's that big sis woke me up."

Right at this moment.

"Fire!"

From one of the rooms in the third floor, an archer let out the order in a quiet voice. Simultaneously, two of the archers rose to their feet, their bows appearing in view of the window.

"Swish!" "Swish!"

Two sharp arrows shot out simultaneously. At the same time, the two archers from the other room shot their arrows as well.

"Swish!" "Swish!"

Two arrows in front, two arrows behind. In the blink of an eye, they ripped through the air, arriving directly in front of Jenne. Two of these arrows were aimed at her, while the other two were aimed at Keane.

At this moment...Linley was still in his room. The old servant, Lambert, was over ten meters away from the two siblings. Given his speed, there was no way he would be able to block in time.

"Young miss!" Lambert could only cry in alarm.

Jenne and Keane both felt the danger coming and turned their heads to look. But all the two siblings saw, as though in slow motion, were those arrows growing closer and closer to them.

The metal arrows sliced through the air with a ear-piercing hissing sound.

“Clang!” “Clang!” “Clang!” “Clang!”

Four sounds in a row.

.....

Jenne and Keane both stood there, frozen with shock. Next to them, Lambert was also frightened stiff. With a ‘squeak’ sound, the door to Linley’s room swung open.

Linley left his room.

“Bebe, all yours.”

Bebe was standing directly in front of Jenne and Keane. Just then, in the blink of an eye, Bebe had easily blocked four arrows in a row.

After the ambush attempt yesterday, Linley had expected this band of assassins to try again today. Thus, he had ordered Bebe to stand guard all night outside, just to be safe.

Given Bebe’s physically small size, when he hid amidst the grassy areas in the courtyard, not even Jenne and Keane would notice him, much less the archers.

“Boss, just watch.” Bebe excitedly licked his lips.

“Swoosh”

A cruel black shadow suddenly flashed through the air. A height of ten or so meters was nothing to Bebe, who jumped directly through the open windows. When the archers who had just failed with their sneak attack saw the little black Shadowmouse, their hearts shook and they immediately attempted to flee.

But before they had a chance to leave their rooms, Bebe had entered.

His two claws flashed forward, and two archers immediately collapsed in pools of blood. Bebe then smashed hard against the wall, going straight through the hole he had created into the other room.

The two remaining archers were hurriedly fleeing as well.

Turning, they saw a black blur flying towards them. The two of them didn’t even have the chance to call out. “Slash!” “Slash!” The sounds of two claws ripping through jugulars could be heard.

Bebe disdainfully looked at the two corpses on the ground, then immediately turned and left via the window, returning to the courtyard. From start to finish, only a few seconds had passed.

“Bebe, nicely done.” Linley praised with a laugh.

Bebe delightedly raised his head up high. At this moment, the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, growled unhappily towards Bebe. “Hmph, if I had gone, I would’ve been even faster.”

Bebe immediately growled unhappily back at the Blackcloud Panther.

Linley couldn't be bothered trying to placate the two of them. Instead, he walked towards Jenne, Keane, and Lambert, who were still in states of shock. They had escaped from life-and-death encounters twice in two days. Although in the past, the two siblings had often been bullied, they had never been in such danger.

"Everything's fine now, everything's fine now."

Linley lightly patted Jenne on her shoulder. With a "Wah!" sound, Jenne suddenly burst into tears, hugging Linley. Next to her, Keane began to blubber as well, also charging forward to hug Linley.

Linley had no choice but to console these two siblings.

After the two of them had calmed down, Linley asked the nearby Lambert, "Lambert, you made our breakfast arrangements already, right?"

"Yes. In a bit, the hotel will probably send people with our breakfast." Lambert looked at Linley with the utmost gratitude in his eyes.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 15, The Apothecary

After experiencing yet another assassination attempt, Jenne and Keane both truly understood how dangerous this trip to Cerre City would be. They were at risk of dying at any moment. Unconsciously, both of them turned towards Linley.

“Big brother Ley, what should we do in the future?” Jenne looked at Linley as she asked this question, her heart filled with worry.

Right now, both Keane and Jenne felt as though they were lost within a boundless haze, unable to see the future. They didn’t know what would happen if they persevered.

Looking at this pair of innocent siblings, Linley consoled them, “Don’t worry. I’m confident in my ability to deal with an acting city governor of a prefectural city.”

Right now, Linley had reached the eighth rank, and was a peak-stage combatant of the ninth rank when Dragonformed. The Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, was also a peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank, and Bebe’s power was no lower than that of Linley and Haeru’s either.

If this man and these two magical beasts attacked together, if no Saint-level combatants appeared, no matter how many people came, they would not be able to stop these three.

Hearing Linley’s words, Jenne and Keane couldn’t help but begin to worship Linley.

Although up till now, the two of them still had no idea as to how powerful Linley truly was, in their eyes, Linley was an amazing, mysterious individual. As for Lambert, upon seeing all this, he felt gratified as well. As long as Jenne and Keane could live a safe life, he would be happy even if he had to die. For such an expert to be willing to help these two countryside-raised siblings without quibbling about anything else was more than enough for this old servant to be filled with gratitude.

“Knock!” “Knock!” “Knock!”

A knocking sound could be heard from outside.

“I’ll get it.” Lambert chortled. “It is probably the attendants bringing breakfast.”

“Let’s get ready to eat.” Linley chuckled as he led Jenne and Keane to the living room. Lambert opened the gate to their residence, and two attendants pushing two food-laden trolleys entered.

“Deliver these to the living room.” Lambert chortled as he instructed them.

“Yes, sir.” The two attendants were extremely meek as they each pushed their trolleys inside. But as they moved in, they glanced at each other, a hint of determination in their eyes.

In this assassination attempt, regardless of whether or not they would succeed, they definitely would die.

They knew that Linley, that powerful expert, was still present. Either Linley or his black panther could easily kill them.

....

Within the living room, Linley was seated at the head of the table. Jenne and Keane were seated at the sides. The two attendants smiled meekly as they pushed the carts into the room.

“Sir, miss, where should we place this whole roast sheep?” The attendant opened one of the lids.

“Place them over there.” Linley gestured at the stone floor nearby the table. The Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, was resting next to that table. Smelling the roasted meat, he raised his head.

For Haeru, an entire roast sheep was nothing more than a light breakfast.

“Yes, sir.” The attendant very obediently placed that huge lamb-covered tray onto the floor. Bebe immediately ran over as well. With a swipe of his sharp paws, he ripped off one of the roasted lamb’s legs.

Haeru stared at Bebe, and then he too went over and began to bite off large chunks of the roasted sheep.

“Sir, please enjoy.” The attendant placed a tray in front of Linley, and then put another tray in front of Jenne.

At the same moment, the other attendant was placing a tray in front of Keane.

Currently...

The two attendants were to each side of Keane. Keane wasn’t suspicious at all, and happily picked up his knife and his fork as he prepared to enjoy this sumptuous meal.

The two attendants exchanged glances. As though they were psychically connected, they suddenly reached out at the same time towards Keane. Their four hands were formed into claws, piercing at Keane’s chest, head, and throat.

Four hands attacking at once!

Ordinary warriors of the fifth and sixth ranks could shatter stones with a single blow. Even warriors of the fourth rank could shatter thick wooden planks.

The vital points of a weak child like Keane probably couldn’t withstand a single blow, whether it was at his head, his chest, or his throat.

They were simply too close.

The two attendants were simply too close to Keane, and they attacked from too close as well. At such a close range, even a warrior of the eighth rank wouldn’t be able to react before Keane was already dead.

Linley let out a cold snort.

A dazzling violet light suddenly flashed, then disappeared. Ear-piercing screams could be heard as the four limbs of the two attendants fell to the floor.

“Ah!!” Jenne was so scared that she jumped to her feet.

“Young master!” Only now did Lambert realize what had almost happened. He angrily kicked the two attendants into the walls, causing the walls to shake.

Those two attendants were moaning in pain. They only exchanged glances, despair in their eyes.

“You...how...” One of them stared at Linley disbelievingly.

They had been less than half a meter away from Keane. Although they were only warriors of the fourth rank, at such a close distance, they didn't even need more than a brief instant to kill Keane.

In such a short period of time, even an expert shouldn't be able to react fast enough.

But not only did Linley manage to react, he had been able to cut all of their arms off.

“Surprised as to why I was able to react in time?” Linley looked calmly at the two of them. “How would ordinary attendants have arms like yours?”

The two of them looked at their severed arms.

The people under the command of that red-haired man were all elite archers. As elite archers, they would often train, causing the veins and muscles in their arms in particular to be protruding.

The two attendants exchanged glances, their eyes filled with despair.

What's more, their arm sockets were constantly leaking blood. Very soon, the two of them would definitely die of blood loss. But they knew...having failed their mission, even if Linley spared them, their captain and Madame Wade wouldn't spare them.

“Don't pay them any mind. We leave now.” Linley stood up.

Jenne and Keane, having experienced two assassination attempts already, didn't have as huge a reaction to this third one as they had before. Keane said softly, “Big brother Ley, what about breakfast? Should we wrap it up and take it with us?”

“No.”

Linley shook his head. “Be careful about the food you eat in the future. I suspect all this food is poisoned.”

“Poisoned?” Keane looked at the food in his plate, terrified.

“Squeak!” Off to the side, Bebe suddenly began to squeak at Linley. Looking at Bebe, Linley couldn't help but begin to laugh.

“Yeah, yeah, you aren't afraid of poison. Alright?” Linley said resignedly.

Magical beasts and humans were very different, biologically. Many magical beasts contained venomous parts and sacs within their bodies to begin with. The poisons which humans feared, they might not fear at all. The more powerful a magical beast was, the stronger their natural immune system was. In addition, since magical beasts generally resided in pristine, untouched forests, they often interacted with various natural toxins from a young age. Thus, one generation after another, magical beasts' resistance to poisons would increase.

.....

Linley's group left the hotel very early in the morning. The red-haired man watched Linley's group depart from afar, his face exceedingly ugly to behold.

“Ley?” The red-haired man muttered. “Where did such a powerful expert come from? And why must he travel with these two countryside-raised siblings?”

The red-haired man was extremely unhappy.

This mission to assassinate Keane and Jenne was originally quite simple. That old servant, Lambert, simply wasn't powerful enough to do anything. But this originally simple mission suddenly became extremely difficult once that mysterious expert got involved.

"Nothing for it. I have to report to the Madame." Knowing how powerful Linley was, the red-haired man didn't dare to take any more risks.

.....

As the most militarily powerful empire of the Four Great Empires, the O'Brien Empire had an extremely thorough communication system sustained primarily by a special communications corps who used Bluewind Hawks.

Every single prefectural city in the O'Brien Empire had quite a few Bluewind Hawks who were controlled solely by the communications corps. Bluewind Hawks were extremely intelligent. They recognized roads and, under the orders of their owners, could take a letter to any place at all.

But only the governing clans of the O'Brien Empire had the authority to use these Bluewind Hawks. Most commoners, and even most nobles, didn't have that authority. And of course, the army had its own stand-alone communications system.

Carrying the seal of the city governor of the prefectural city of Cerre, the red-haired man requested Blackrock City to send a Bluewind Hawk towards the city of Cerre.

....

Flying in a straight line in the air was far faster than running on the road. Not long after Linley's group had left Blackrock City, the Bluewind Hawk arrived at Cerre.

The prefectural city of Cerre. This was a fairly large city.

In the Northwest Administrative Province, it was one of the top ten cities. At this moment, within the castle that was reserved for the city governor, the mood was very dark and very sinister.

The master of this castle was Madame Wade! An infamously cold, grim, arrogant person.

"Sis, sis!"

Two middle-aged men came running into the rear flower garden. At this moment, Madame Wade was enjoying the radiant sun while being tended to by two serving women.

"What's wrong, my two dear brothers?" Madame Wade lifted her head up as she looked at the two men.

"Sis, this is the mail that just came by courier. This mission was a failure." The slightly chubbier of the two men said.

"Failed? How could Kerde [Ke'de] be so useless?" Madame Wade took over the letter. Reading it, she began to scowl, confused. "A mysterious expert who has a black panther as a magical beast companion?"

Per what the red-haired man, Kerde, was saying, that black panther was at least a magical beast of the eighth rank, and that mysterious expert was at least a combatant of the eighth rank, and perhaps even the ninth.

Madame Wade suddenly felt that the letter was extremely heavy.

“Sis, what should we do?” Madame Wade’s eldest brother, that chubby man, asked. Madame Wade’s second brother also looked at her hopefully.

Madame Wade frowned as she considered the issue.

“My two brothers, please request the services of Apothecary Holmer [Huo’er’mo].” Madame Wade said calmly.

“Holmer? That old freak?” Her second brother immediately cried out in surprise.

Madame Wade said coldly, “According to Kerde’s investigations, this mysterious ‘Ley’ fellow is at least a combatant of the eighth rank, perhaps even of the ninth. I don’t have the ability to kill a combatant of the ninth rank face to face. It’s best to have Apothecary Holmer take care of this affair. After all, Apothecary Holmer has killed a combatant of the ninth rank before.”

“But Holmer...” Madame Wade’s eldest brother hesitated as well.

“Hmph. If the two of you keep on acting like this, you’ll never accomplish anything. Even if I kill Keane, if you two act like this, do you think you will be fit to be city governors?” Madame Wade snorted coldly.

“Fine, sis. We’ll go speak to Apothecary Holmer right now!” Madame Wade’s two older brothers submitted to her.

.....

‘Apothecary Holmer’ was a title which Holmer had given himself.

Others viewed Holmer as a murderer, but Holmer viewed himself as an Apothecary.

And indeed, Holmer’s abilities in preserving life were quite high. Holmer was almost three hundred years old now. For a warrior of the sixth rank to live for nearly three hundred years was nearly impossible, but Holmer had done so. What’s more, Holmer looked as though he was in quite good shape. This was because Holmer often used various bizarre concoctions, allowing his three-hundred year old body to be as strong and healthy as a young man’s.

“Huh. Madame Wade is quite generous. This business transaction...I accept, I accept.” Holmer stroked his graying beard, laughing delightedly.

In front of Holmer, Madame Wade’s two brothers were still rather nervous.

“Apothecary Homer, it would be best if you act quickly.” Madame Wade’s eldest brother urged. “Our people will deliver you to your target.”

“Haha, first give me a down payment. I’ll head out right away afterwards.” Holmer laughed loudly.

“Down payment?” The two brothers looked at each other.

In the prefectural city of Cerre, the two of them had never been treated like this before. But after learning a bit about Holmer, the two brothers didn’t dare to irritate this elderly, self-proclaimed ‘Apothecary’. Once this old man got angry, no one knew how many people might die as a result.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 16, The Yulan River

The greatest river within the Yulan continent was, without a doubt, the Yulan River. The Yulan River's main stream flowed through the O'Brien Empire, the Yulan Empire, the Rhine Empire, and the Rohault Empire. Its countless tributaries were densely spread across each of the four empires.

It would be fair to say that the Yulan River nourished and gave life to over half of humanity.

"What a wide river." Seated on the deck of a multi-level ship, Linley stared with awe at the vast, turgid waters of the Yulan River.

This ship had been employed by Linley for his usage alone.

He spent ten thousand gold coins to have it take the group directly to the harbor nearest to Cerre City. That harbor was less than a hundred kilometers from Cerre.

As Linley had explained it, if they continued on their originally planned route, who knows how many more assassination attempts they would have to endure? It was better for them to directly commission a boat to take them southwards through the Yulan River.

This boat had been commissioned by Linley on the spot. Linley didn't believe that the people who worked on this ship all belonged to Madame Wade's forces. Madame Wade's influence did not, after all, hold much sway near Blackrock City.

"Big brother Ley." Jenne came out of the ship's cabin.

In the middle of this river, the wind was very strong. It blew against Jenne's long hair and long dress. Smiling, Jenne looked at Linley. Walking next to him, she sat down as well. "Big brother Ley, to think that originally, I had wanted to employ you for ten thousand gold coins." Jenne said these words with quite some embarrassment.

To Jenne and Keane, ten thousand gold coins was an enormous sum of money.

But how could they have imagined that Linley would go ahead and specially commission the services of this ship? The amount of money it cost to specially commission a large ship such as this was quite high. Although the distance between Cerre and Blackrock was not that high, the cost was ten thousand gold coins. And what's more, this was an extremely discounted price that they had given Linley as a show of respect to him, a powerful combatant who had a black panther for a companion.

So far, Linley had taken only a single gold coin out of the ten thousand gold coins he had been promised as his 'hiring fee'.

But by now, Linley himself had already spent ten thousand gold coins. It wasn't strange for Jenne to be embarrassed. Jenne and her brother had wanted to pay for the boat themselves...but of course, they currently had no money.

"Jenne, don't you think that the scenery here is quite beautiful?" Linley walked to the end of the deck, which was surrounded by protective steel chains.

Linley rested his hands against the steel chains, looking at the surroundings.

The rolling waves of the Yulan River could be seen for kilometers about. At its widest, the Yulan River was several kilometers wide; at its narrowest, it was still hundreds of meters wide. This was the 'mother river' for the entire Yulan continent. Who knows how many people it had given life to? The recorded history of the Yulan continent had stretched back for hundreds of thousands of years.

"This Yulan River must have existed for hundreds of thousands of years as well."

Gazing at the turgid river waters, Linley couldn't help but imagine what it would've been like, hundreds of thousands of years ago. As he lost himself within this massive, boundless river, Linley felt his heart become unbounded as well.

"The people and kingdoms from hundreds of thousands of years back have turned to dust long ago. Compared to the endless march of history, where kingdoms and empires rise then collapse, personal grudges and enmities are so meaningless and small."

Facing this vast river, Linley had a very strange feeling.

"Right now, the Yulan continent has six major political entities. The Four Great Empires, the Holy Union, and the Dark Alliance." Linley's heart was extremely calm.

Ever since he was young, Linley's goals had been to realize his father's dreams, and to stand at the highest levels of training and power.

But after his father died, Linley's heart had fallen into a dark abyss. He had embarked on a road to revenge, a road of slaughter...and on this road, Linley had lost his Grandpa Doebling.

The three years of training he had spent in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts and his communing with nature had allowed nature to cleanse his soul. His heart was now as calm as still water, and he had transformed, like a butterfly emerging from the cocoon.

"Only by reaching the pinnacle of power can one realize one's dreams. Despite being such an enormous organization, when the Holy Union came face to face with that Dylin, didn't they choose to retreat?"

Linley had total confidence in himself.

"There will come a day when I, too, will reach those heights." Staring at the raging waves, Linley felt nothing but great ambitions, as boundless as the river.

....

The captain of this ship had an extremely easy life. Although the rapids of the Yulan River were rather fast, it was still far safer than the sea. The captain even had time to casually chat with his sailors.

"Hey, did you guys see that black panther?" The captain said delightedly. "That's a magical beast. You just wait and see. My own son will tame a magical beast of his own soon."

"Captain, that's a panther-type magical beast. Do you think your son could tame one of those?" The nearby sailors began to laugh. There wasn't too much of a social stratification between a captain and his sailors. Both were men who made their livings on the sea.

The captain sighed emotionally. "High-class magical beasts. I really admire those people who can tame one. I remember how last year, when we went to the imperial capital, I saw the War God's College accept new honorary disciples. Wow. You have no idea how many experts were there. Some were mounted on

enormous magical beasts, while others were seated on flying magical beasts...so many experts all rushed there, struggling to be the one to qualify for that sole slot. Those battles and those movements between the experts...all I saw were blurs. They were too fast, too fast.”

The sailors all began to make wild boasts about the experts they had seen before.

In the O’Brien Empire, every single child wanted to become a powerful combatant, with being recruited by the War God’s College being their ultimate goal.

....

Linley was seated meditatively on the wooden deck, allowing the wind to blow against him. His adamantite heavy sword was on his legs. His eyes closed, Linley was quietly attuning with the boundless vastness of the Yulan River’s waters.

“The power to impose is the power of the heavens, the power of the earth, the power of the boundless oceans.” Linley’s spirit had totally become one with the wind. He almost felt as though he could sense the vast riverbed of the Yulan River as well as the boundless land surrounding it.

Naturally, he could also sense that rushing river as well.

The ship continued to sail forward. They did stop occasionally in their journey so as to allow everyone to have some food, but Linley remained in the meditative posture on the deck, not eating at all.

In the blink of an eye, six days had passed.

“Sis, is big bro Ley gonna be ok? He hasn’t eaten or drank anything.” Keane pointed at Linley, who was still in the meditative posture, as he worriedly asked Jenne.

Jenne was somewhat worried as well, but she shook her head helplessly. “I don’t know either. That Bebe won’t let us get near him though.”

“Don’t worry.” The captain of the ship walked over, chuckling. “Those high-level experts aren’t like us ordinary folks. To them, even traversing a precipice ten thousand fathoms deep is of no issue. Not even a million man army can stop them. I’ve heard of people who, in the course of their meditative training, neither ate nor drank for months. At their level, not eating or drinking for months is actually quite normal.” Although the captain used the word ‘normal’ when he spoke, a trace of envy was in his eyes.

Hearing the ship captain’s words, Jenne and Keane began to feel even more astonished.

“Can it be?”

Suddenly, a murmur could be heard. Jenne, Keane, and the captain all turned their heads towards Linley, and when they did, they were shocked.

Holding the adamantite heavy sword in his hands, Linley jumped directly into the river.

“Big brother Ley!” Jenne shouted in alarm.

The three of them immediately ran over to the deck. Running to those locked steel chains, they stared down. To their amazement, they saw that Linley was currently standing on top of the water, the adamantite heavy sword in his hands. He floated up and down with the waves, but didn’t sink down at all.

This sight stunned them all and left them gaping in shock.

Mid-air flight was something only a person at the Saint-level could do.

“Earth...fire...water...wind...” Linley murmured in a quiet voice, and then suddenly, he thrust his adamantine black sword towards the sky. As the adamantine heavy sword shot up, it seemed as though a hole had been pierced in the sky, as a dreadful, screeching howl could be heard from the air.

At the same time, all the water surrounding Linley suddenly erupted skywards like a geyser.

“Haha.” Linley laughed loudly and happily, and then his body could be seen constantly moving and spinning about amidst the waves. The river water seemed to follow Linley’s movements, as the heavy sword constantly shrieked and howled with each stroke.

All the river water in an area of a hundred meters around Linley had gone wild.

Sometimes, the water would all rise tens of meters into the sky, while at other times, they would form a giant whirlpool. Other times, the water would shoot out like sharp arrows in every direction, while at other times, it would just circle around Linley....

“Clang.” A crisp, clear sound rang out from the heavy sword entering its sheath.

Those wild waters suddenly calmed down. In the blink of an eye, the Yulan River once more returned to its ordinary state, with just a few lingering effects. Striding on the waves, Linley didn’t sink down at all.

But this time, Linley wasn’t using his wind-style magic to counteract the effects of the weight of the adamantine heavy sword.

Rather, he was using his new insights on how to ‘impose’.

“This ‘imposing’ force was the force of the heavens. It is also the force of the enormous earth and the boundless seas.” A hint of a smile was on Linley’s face. With a gentle leap, Linley vaulted back onto the deck of the ship.

This entire time, Linley had been focusing on understanding ‘impose’ through his affinity to earth and wind. But over the course of these six days of meditation, Linley was able to sense the movements of the waves, and he also remembered the blazing passion of the fire elemental essences in fire-style magic.

Dense, graceful, pliable, and passionate.

When these aspects of these four elements were merged with each other in a sword stroke, they could make the universe move. This was what ‘impose’ truly meant. In the past, Linley’s understanding of ‘impose’ was nothing more than the most rudimentary of understandings.

“Big brother Ley, just now, what were you, what was...?” Keane was very excited, but he didn’t know what to say.

Jenne was looking at Linley with awe as well.

What Linley had just done had truly stunned them. Even the captain, who was well-travelled and worldly, had never seen such an awesome spectacle.

“Just training.” Linley said with a calm smile.

Although in the records of his clan, the highest level of using heavy weapons was this third level of ‘impose’, Linley suddenly had a certain feeling.

‘Impose’ was not the end of the road.

There was something even greater than it.

After reaching the ‘impose’ level, and in particular, after his soul could become attuned to nature, Linley always had this feeling...that there were even more profound truths awaiting him. Linley could dimly sense them, but he had no way of actually comprehending them.

“Battle-qi and brute strength are only the most basic of building blocks. In order for one’s attacks to become more powerful, having a deep grasp of these profound principles is extremely important.”

You might possess the power to lift something that weighed a million pounds, but if your movements were too stupid and clumsy, you might only be able to unleash 10% of your total power.

After training hard, you might be able to unleash 30%.

Experts would be able to unleash 70%.

But what Linley wanted to do was to unleash 100%. And, borrowing from the ‘imposing force’ of the universe itself, strike blows that were more powerful than he himself was physically capable of.

“Jenne, Keane, how far are we from the shore?” Linley asked.

“We are another day off,” the nearby captain replied.

Linley nodded, then instructed, “How about this. Let’s not get off too close to Cerre City. Let’s get off at the harbor one stop removed from Cerre City.”

“Yes, Lord Ley.” Although the ship captain didn’t understand the reason, he still agreed.

.....

Linley’s choice to travel by river had thrown all of Madame Wade’s forces into a state of confusion. That red-haired man, Kerde, in the end had managed to learn that Linley’s group had travelled by ship and were advancing through the Yulan River.

No matter how powerful Apothecary Holmer was, he couldn’t just leap past a river that was hundreds of meters across at its narrowest and get onto the opponent’s boat, right? Even if he was able to get on the boat, they would no doubt be highly suspicious of his intentions.

Thus, they could only lie in ambush at the port, as if they were waiting for a hare to fall into their snare.

However...

Based on their calculations, the ship should’ve already arrived by now.

“What’s going on? Shouldn’t they have arrived yesterday?” Apothecary Holmer was resting in a commoner’s house in a town that was located quite near the port.

“Master Holmer, please wait a bit longer.” Madame Wade’s subordinates were extremely frantic as well.

Suddenly, the door to the residence swung open, and one of Madame Wade’s subordinates rushed in. He angrily said, “Master Holmer, they didn’t stop at this harbor; they stopped at the previous one. They have already reached a small city named Redsand which is quite near Cerre. Most likely, they will reach the prefectural city of Cerre by tonight.

“They are arriving tonight?” Apothecary Holmer was startled.

“Quick, we need to head out immediately.” Apothecary Holmer immediately ordered, and the entire group frantically hurried back in the direction of the prefectural city of Cerre.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey – Chapter 17, Poison Gas Fluttering in the Wind

The city of Redsand was a small one, and there were only a few tens of thousands of people within it.

When Linley's group left the boat, they headed directly towards the prefectural city of Cerre. On the way there, they stopped by Redsand City, preparing to have a quick lunch.

In a private room in the second floor of a hotel, Jenne and Keane both had excited smiles on their faces.

"Haha, by tonight, we will reach Cerre City. By then, we'll have much fewer troubles." Keane chortled.

Jenne nodded as well. "Once we reach Cerre, our aunt probably wouldn't openly move against us, right?"

"Jenne, Keane, things won't be as easy as you think." Linley laughed calmly. "Once we reach Cerre, it will actually be even more dangerous. Your so-called aunt isn't as timid and fearful as you seem to think she is."

When women decided to be venomous, they could be extremely terrifying.

During his three years in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, Linley had encountered all sorts of cruel, vicious people. Jenne's aunt was totally capable of having Keane killed within Cerre City, and in a manner which didn't implicate her at all.

"Really?" Keane was somewhat afraid now. After all, he was a fourteen year old boy.

Linley laughed. "But don't worry too much. There's no need for us to rush to Cerre City this afternoon. Let's have a good rest in Redsand City first. Tomorrow morning, we will head out."

"Tomorrow morning?" Jenne and Keane both looked at Linley.

"If my predictions are correct, the people your aunt undoubtedly stationed at the river have already discovered that we disembarked one harbor early. They should be able to calculate that we would arrive at Cerre City at around nightfall. Thus...there is an 80% to 90% chance that they will be waiting for us there, tonight."

Linley could easily deduce such simple stratagems.

As long as one could think things through from another's perspective, one could easily lead them by the nose.

"Let's rest up and recover our strength. Tomorrow morning, we head out." Linley laughed loudly. "There's no rush right now. Let's have a good lunch."

Jenne and Keane revealed hints of smiles on their faces.

....

Indeed, as Linley had predicted, Apothecary Holmer and his group had headed directly for Cerre City. Madame Wade's people in Cerre City had received this information as well.

On the walls of Cerre city.

Madame Wade was leaning on a parapet, staring outside the city. Behind her were her two brothers as well as Apothecary Holmer. As for the city guards, they had all scattered at her command.

"Mr. Holmer, I'll have to trouble you to wait here tonight for a while." Madame Wade turned her head towards Holmer, smiling.

Apothecary Holmer knew his own limits.

He personally wasn't that powerful. The most powerful weapon available to him was his poisons. Naturally, he wouldn't want to offend this malicious person in front of him, who was the true power in Cerre city.

"Madame Wade, don't worry. Those siblings definitely will not live to arrive at Cerre city."

Holmer was very confident. "Even if they have an escort who is of the ninth rank, hmph. As long as he hasn't reached the Saint-level, I am confident in my ability to deal with him. But of course...he can't already know who I am."

If a combatant of the ninth rank were to recognize him and activate his battle-qi, the battle-qi would be sufficient to easily repel the poison.

"Mr. Holmer, all these years, you've resided here in Cerre City. You aren't a person who likes to show yourself either. How many people could have possibly seen you? What's more, I've heard that you, Mr. Holmer, possess the ability to change your appearance?" Madame Wade laughed as she looked at Holmer.

Holmer laughed happily. Stroking his beard, he said, "Haha. Madame Wade, change my appearance? You praise me too highly. All I do is to use some medicinal concoctions to change the color of my skin and hair. And then a little makeup...even people who know me, as long as they don't carefully inspect me, won't be able to recognize me."

Madame Wade smiled as she nodded. "Then I leave everything in your hands, Mr. Holmer. Tonight, I will stay in the nearby hotel and await your good news."

Holmer laughed confidently.

....

But as time went on, Madame Wade, who was in that hotel nearest to the city walls, was beginning to grow confused. Because quite soon, the city gates would close for the night.

The rule of Cerre City was that at ten o'clock sharp, the gates would be shut.

But Jenne and Keane's group still had yet to arrive. Based on Madame Wade's information, Jenne's group had arrived at Redsand City by lunchtime. Even if they travelled slowly, they should've reached here by now.

Ten o'clock arrived.

Those enormous city gates began to slowly close as a large number of guards pushed at them. Apothecary Holmer, who had meticulously prepared for this battle, descended from the walls with a belly full of anger. Madame Wade also walked out of the hotel.

“Madame Wade, what is this?” Holmer was truly upset now.

After receiving the news, he had run all the way back from the harbor to the city. The bumpy, long ride was quite miserable for this 300-year old Holmer.

And then, he had stood up there on the walls for half the night, with the icy wind blowing at him the entire time.

And now, the city gates were shutting. But no one came.

“Who knows what is going on with that group of people. I’m afraid they might have taken a rest at Redsand City. Mr. Holmer, why don’t you rest here at the hotel tonight? Let’s see what tomorrow brings.” Madame Wade was not in a good mood either.

“That’s the only option we have right now.” Holmer was extremely disgruntled.

....

The next dawn, just as the city gates opened, Holmer began to quietly wait for them to arrive. By 9 o’clock in the morning, Holmer was truly furious.

Holmer rushed down from the city walls and charged directly into the second floor of the hotel.

“Madame Wade. If they aren’t coming to us, I’ll go to them.” Holmer said directly. “Give me some men, at least one of whom recognizes those two siblings.”

Madame Wade approved of this idea. “Alright. Then I’ll have to trouble you, Mr. Holmer, to make this trip.”

“This time, I really have to give these people a taste of my power.” Holmer said quietly, his eyes filled with a murderous look.

After purchasing a carriage in Redsand City, Jenne and Keane entered the carriage, with the old servant, Lambert, being the driver. As for Linley, he rode on the back of his Blackcloud Panther, Haeru.

Haeru was more than two meters tall and very broad-backed. His fur was very smooth and soft as well.

Riding on the Blackcloud Panther, Linley couldn’t feel any bumps in the road as well. The ride was far more comfortable than that of a horse or a carriage. What’s more, the Blackcloud Panther ran up mountains as easily as it ran on prairies.

“Big brother Ley. What time is it now?” Keane poked his head out of the carriage and asked Linley.

Linley glanced at him. “Don’t be impatient. It’s only ten o’clock. We most likely will arrive at Cerre City by eleven o’clock.”

The Blackcloud Panther which Linley was riding on was very awe-inspiring. Everyone on the road who saw Linley all moved aside early on to allow Linley the right of way.

“Giddyup, giddyup!”

From far away, the sound of hoof steps could be heard. Soon, three mounted knights could be seen in the distance, but as soon as they saw Linley, all three were terrified and came to a halt.

“What a massive panther.” One of the knights sighed, staring at the black panther Linley was riding.

“Stop staring. Let’s move.” The other knight said.

Just at this time, another stallion trotted past them. This stallion was ridden by a kindly looking old hunchback with pure white hair. The speed of the old man’s horse was fairly slow, and it clip-clopped its way forward.

“Haha, look at him. He’s so old, but still rides a horse. Haha...” One of the knights laughed loudly.

“Let’s go. We have business to attend to.”

The three knights laughed calmly, continuing on their way. Right at this time, that hunchbacked old man raised his head to glance at Linley’s group. This hunchback immediately understood.

Per their pre-arranged agreement, if they encountered the targets, the knights would say, “Haha, look at him. He’s so old, but still rides a horse.” What’s more, Holmer also knew that the mysterious expert had a black panther as a pet.

....

“Those three knights don’t have any knightly chivalry at all.” Keane, who had seen all this through the window, said unhappily once the three knights left.

But Linley frowned as he stared at the hunchback.

The hunchback rode the horse in a manner that did indeed inspire concern. Just from the look of him, one could tell that he was extremely old. Although the horse wasn’t moving too fast, the hunchback continued to sway back and forth on the horse’s back, as though he could fall off at any moment. His legs didn’t seem to be too firmly clamped on the horse’s back either.

Right at this moment, a carriage appeared from behind the old hunchback as well.

“Fuck off, you old fart.” One of the knights cursed loudly. The hunchback immediately whipped his horse, moving it to the side of the road.

“Ahhh!”

When the horse was roughly ten or so meters away from Linley’s group, the old hunchback swayed again and fell off his horse.

“The old grandpa fell off!” Keane, seeing this from through the window, immediately pushed open the door to come out and help.

But just as the old man fell off, a light blue wave of gas emanated from his body. That light blue gas was extremely thin and light, so much so that if someone wasn’t specifically looking for it, it would be quite hard to discern.

The wind just so happened to be blowing from the east, and it blew the gas directly towards Linley. But of course, the first people to be impacted by the poison gas was the people in the carriage which had just passed by.

“Crumple.”

One knight after another collapsed from their horses to the ground, fresh blood leaking out of their noses.

“Hrm?” Linley also felt that something in his body seemed off, and his head felt a little dizzy.

“Not good. Poison.” Attuned to the wind, Linley could clearly sense that a light blue poisonous gas was wafting in his direction. By now, Linley had already taken two breaths of it.

The Dragonblood battle-qi in Linley’s body immediately rose up, absorbing all of the poisonous gas in Linley’s body, with none of it harming him at all.

This poisonous gas was a poison which Holmer had specially designed to be used against humans, based on human biology.

But Holmer could never have imagined that Linley was very different, biologically speaking, from ordinary people. Within his veins was the bloodline of the Dragonblood Warriors, an ancestral bloodline that was many times more exalted than even the bloodlines of magical beasts. In the past, even the magicite core of the Armored Razorback Wurm had been absorbed and consumed by just the small amount of Dragonblood that was in Linley’s veins at that time.

Normal people simply couldn’t imagine or understand the special abilities and attributes of each of the Four Supreme Warriors.

This sort of poison gas couldn’t hurt a Dragonblood Warrior at all.

“Wind.”

Based on his mastery of wind elemental essence granted to him by being a wind-style magus, Linley immediately controlled the air around him to blow the wind backwards. The poisonous gas immediately blew back towards the east. By now, the squad of knights that were between the ‘hunchback’ Holmer and Linley had all died.

The poisonous gas blew back towards Holmer, but he didn’t dodge. He was not afraid of his own poisons. But what he was afraid of... was Linley.

“Giddyup, giddyup!” Holmer suddenly became quite agile, leaping back onto his horse and then sending it galloping east as fast as he could.

“Haeru.” Linley said in a cold voice.

“Swoooooosh.”

The Blackcloud Panther’s speed was terrifyingly fast, many times faster than an ordinary stallion.

In the blink of an eye, he traversed several hundred meters, and actually passed by Holmer, landing in front of him. All that had been visible during this motion was a black blur.

Seeing Linley suddenly appear in front of him, Holmer immediately grew frantic.

“My friend, I was paid by others to do this. If you are willing to spare me, I will give you as much gold as you wish.” Although Holmer was more than three hundred years old, he didn’t want to die yet.

Thinking back to what just happened, Linley still felt afraid.

Fortunately, he had managed to react in time and blow the poison gas back before it had entered the carriage.

“Poison gas? Are you a necromancer?” Linley looked at Holmer.

“Necromancer?” Holmer was startled, then shook his head. “No. I’m an apothecary. My friend, I am quite wealthy. Ten thousand gold coins? Twenty thousand? Or perhaps, a hundred thousand?” At a time like this, Holmer was still trying to save money.

But Linley couldn’t even be bothered to speak to him.

“Haeru, deal with it.”

Linley hopped off the black panther, heading back towards the carriage. As for the Blackcloud Panther, he revealed his sharp fangs, and then pounced directly towards Holmer.

“Ah! A million! Ten million! Ah!!!!” Before Holmer had even finished calling out, he had been flattened by a single blow from the Blackcloud Panther’s massive paw.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 18, The Prefectural City of Cerre

The desolate wilderness.

The tens of people escorting the carriage were all dead. The black blood oozing from their bodies made the scene all the more sinister. Holmer, in turn, had been smashed to death by a single blow from Haeru. Jenne and Keane, who had watched this all from the carriage, were totally stunned.

“Big brother Ley.” Keane called out in alarm. Jenne’s face was rather pale as well.

Just as Linley was about to respond, that old servant, Lambert, who was driving the carriage suddenly called out in surprise as he stared at the corpse of Holmer. “Him! He’s the deadliest killer in Cerre City, Holmer. That old freak who styled himself an apothecary.”

“Holmer? Grandpa Lambert, who are you talking about?” Keane looked at Lambert.

Lambert took a deep breath. “Young master, young miss, this Holmer was an extremely dangerous individual within Cerre City. In the past, when I was serving your mother in the city, I encountered him a few times. At the time, Count Wade had mentioned this Holmer to your mother as well. This Holmer is an extremely skilled user of poisons. Although he is only a warrior of the sixth rank, he once killed a combatant of the ninth rank.”

Only now did Jenne and Keane understand.

Linley, listening to the side, nodded as well.

“This Holmer is extremely greedy. Most likely, his actions this time were at the direction of the senior madame as well.” Lambert’s face was extremely solemn. “The senior madame really has her mind set on killing you!”

“With big brother Ley, we have nothing to fear!” Keane was very confident. Jenne also looked confidently at Linley.

“Enough. Let’s head out immediately so we can arrive sooner at Cerre.” Linley said directly. Linley’s group immediately made haste towards the prefectural city of Cerre, leaving behind a cloud of dust on the desolate road.

The prefectural city of Cerre. This was a city with around two to three hundred thousand people. Its red walls stretched off into the distance. In terms of architecture, the buildings of Cerre tended towards the ornate.

Keane pushed open the door to the carriage. Seeing the beautiful, majestic city in front of them, Keane’s heart was filled with boundless ambition. His eyes lit up, and he said, “From this day forth, I shall be the master of this prefectural city.”

Outside the city gates.

“Black panther?” When the gate guards saw Linley’s mount from the distance, they had immediately called out to the other guards nearby, “Quick, someone go speak with the madame. The person she spoke of is arriving.”

“Okay.”

A gate guard immediately ran towards the hotel located nearest to the city gates, rushing up to the second floor. At this moment, there was a warrior stationed outside the stairway. Seeing that it was a gate guard who was running this way, the warrior allowed him passage.

“Madame Countess.” The guard fell respectfully to one knee.

“Madame Countess, the expert riding a black panther which you spoke of has arrived. There is a carriage behind him.”

“What?” Before Madame Wade had reacted, the two brothers of her who were standing behind her called out in alarm.

Madame Wade frowned. “Leave for now.”

“Yes.” The guard respectfully withdrew.

Right now, both of Madame Wade’s brothers were growing frantic. Her eldest brother hurriedly said, “Sis, they actually survived their journey to Cerre. Can it be that Holmer, that old freak, failed?”

“Hard to say.”

Madame Wade was frowning. “Perhaps that expert with the black panther who was escorting those two countryside-raised siblings didn’t come on the main road from Redsand City. Perhaps they intentionally took a detour and caused Holmer and the others to miss them.”

Hearing her words, her two brothers couldn’t help but nod.

Indeed, it was very possible that their opponents had craftily taken a roundabout path enroute to Cerre City.

“Then what should we now do?” Madame Wade’s two brothers looked at her.

“Go down and welcome them.” A hint of a smile was on Madame Wade’s face. “My two darling children have returned, after suffering for so many years. They are finally back. As their loving aunt, how can I not go welcome them?”

And as she spoke, Madame Wade headed down the stairs.

Right as they walked out of the main door of the hotel, Madame Wade saw the tall and sturdy man with a heavy sword on his back who was riding a handsome black panther, as well as the familiar face of Lambert.

“Oh, Lambert, long time no see.” Madame Wade immediately called out in a high pitched voice.

Linley, Jenne, Keane, and Lambert all swung their heads to look at her. Lambert started, then respectfully said, “Senior madame.”

Madame Wade laughed warmly. “These two children should be Jenne and Keane. Jenne is even more beautiful than before, and she looks more like her mother now as well. Keane isn’t the child that he used to be either. He’s even more handsome now.”

Jenne and Keane could both recognize Madame Wade.

Although nearly eight years had passed, Madame Wade's appearance hadn't changed much, with the exception of a slight wrinkle at the corner of her eyes.

"Senior madame." Jenne and Keane both paid their respects.

"Wonderful, wonderful. And there's no need to stand on courtesy." Madame Wade chortled, then looked at Linley. "And this is?"

"This is big brother Ley." Keane hurriedly answered.

"Ley?" Madame Wade's eyelids flickered, then she laughed. "Oh, Mr. Ley. I imagine it must have been you who protected and escorted them to Cerre City. I absolutely must thank you on behalf of Jenne and Keane. Come, let's all go to the castle. Tonight, I am going to arrange a magnificent banquet for my two poor little children."

The castle of the city governor was a square block, and was quite an imposing sight.

"What a useless fellow." After hearing the news which the messenger knights had delivered, Madame Wade was even more furious.

Holmer had been a chess piece that she had trusted.

But now that Holmer had failed, Madame Wade felt extremely frustrated.

"With that Mr. Ley present, it will very hard for me to kill Keane." Madame Wade was extremely angry. "Poison? The poison used by ordinary poison experts won't be able to escape detection. Assassins? How many can deal with this Ley?"

Madame Wade's eyes slowly sharpened.

"Looks like there's only that one method left." The worry disappeared from Madame Wade's eyes. The only thing left was confidence and callousness.

Within the enormous dining room of the castle, the giant glass chandelier had been lit, casting its resplendent, bewitching light upon the room. All of the nobles of Cerre City were present today.

"I've heard that Count Wade's son has returned. I wonder how Madame Wade will deal with this."

"Who knows? But Madame Wade definitely will not give up her authority."

"Madame Wade is extremely vicious. Sadly for her, her baby boy died in the arms of a woman. What a joke." The various nobles chatted in soft tones.

Whom amongst them did not know that Madame Wade was a tyrannical, domineering woman? But since they lived in Cerre City, at most they would mock her in private. They didn't dare to publicly offend her.

"Madame Wade has arrived."

Instantly, all of the gossiping nobles ceased their discourse. They all turned to look towards Madame Wade, who had just descended from the stairway. Madame Wade still looked as stately and arrogant as she ever had.

Madame Wade enjoyed the attention of the people present. She tilted her head up slightly as she descended.

“Everyone.” Madame Wade laughed. “Today is a joyous occasion. Those two poor children of mine, who have suffered outside for eight years, have finally returned today.”

At this time, two more people suddenly appeared at the stairway.

One was a young man wearing a black gentleman’s suit, while the other was a golden-haired young lady wearing a white, full-bodied dress. They came out together, and the eyes of many nobles lit up.

Although Jenne was dressed very simply, when matched with her appearance, her figure, and her kind, innocent demeanor, she was a soul-stirring sight. Many young nobles present made up their minds to go over later and ask who that girl was.

“Jenne, Keane, come.” Madame Wade called out to them warmly.

Jenne and Keane walked down the stairway together, standing besides Madame Wade. Madame Wade called out warmly, “This is Jenne. Look, what a beautiful girl she is. And this handsome young man is Keane.” Madame Wade sighed emotionally. “Jenne and Keane have finally escaped their bitter lives. But their mother, my dear sister...” Madame Wade’s eyes grew red, as though she were about to cry.

“Senior madame, if the second madame knew how much you cared about her, she would undoubtedly be very moved.” An ancient voice rang out, and Lambert walked in with Linley by his side.

Madame Wade glanced at Lambert.

Lambert was previously the second madame’s most faithful servant. Even after the second madame had fallen into dire straits, he continued to follow her without complaint.

Jenne and Keane felt extremely unhappy as well.

They knew that the reason for their mother’s deaths and those eight bitter years they had suffered were all caused by this senior madame in front of them. Jenne knew how to hide her thoughts, but the fourteen year old Keane ridiculed angrily, “Senior madame, why didn’t you ever come visit us during these eight years? We’ve missed you so terribly.”

Madame Wade’s facial expression didn’t change at all. She sighed, “All these years, I’ve been working on behalf of Cerre City, and I’ve never had time. Every time I think about this, I feel I’ve mistreated the two of you.”

Linley suddenly laughed and said directly, “Madame Wade, Count Wade has now passed away, and Keane is his successor. The reason he has returned this time is to assume the position of city governor. Madame Wade, I wonder if you have already decided on a date for Keane to assume the city governor’s position?”

Everyone in the dining room fell silent upon hearing these words.

All of the nobles present knew that the main act of the play was starting.

At the same time, all of the nobles stared at Linley in puzzlement. They didn’t know where this youngster had come from, for him to dare to so boldly and directly say these words.

“Mr. Ley.” Madame Wade’s face grew hard, and she said coldly, “As their aunt, I must thank you for escorting Jenne and Keane to Cerre City. But the question of Keane taking over the governorship is an internal affair of our clans. It isn’t very appropriate for you, an outsider, to get involved, is it?”

Keane immediately refuted, “And who says big brother Ley is an outsider?”

“If he isn’t an outsider, what is he?” Madame Wade’s face was very cold.

Keane was startled, then he looked up at Linley and said, “Big brother Ley is, is, is my sister’s fiancé. How could he be an outsider?”

“Fiancé?” Madame Wade was flabbergasted.

Jenne was flabbergasted.

Linley was flabbergasted.

“Fiancé?” Linley immediately looked at Keane. Keane only winked at Linley. Linley immediately understood what Keane meant.

Right at this moment, Jenne’s face turned red.

“How about that?” Keane arrogantly tilted his head up. “My brother-in-law to be is qualified to discuss this, isn’t he? Aunt, my father is dead, as is my elder brother. I am now the primary successor.”

Madame Wade was silent.

All of the people present looked at Madame Wade. Keane’s position as primary successor to the governorship was indisputable and protected by imperial law. They wanted to see how Madame Wade would handle it.

“Haha, Keane, what’s the rush?” Madame Wade laughed. “Your father is dead, and you are his only surviving son. Naturally, you are his primary successor. The governorship is yours, of course. No one will take it from you.”

Linley looked suspiciously at Madame Wade.

Linley wasn’t alone. Everyone’s hearts were filled with suspicion. Madame Wade wasn’t the sort to so easily give up.

“Then thank you, aunt.” Keane smiled. “Then when shall I assume the governorship?” Madame Wade chuckled, “No rush, no rush. Right now, Keane, you aren’t of age yet. How about this. In two years, when you reach the age of maturity, you can assume the governorship.”

“Two years later?” Keane stared.

Madame Wade was beaming. “Keane, be a good boy. You aren’t of age yet. You don’t have enough ability to manage a city. Don’t worry. Two years from now, you will definitely be the governor of the prefectural city of Cerre.”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 19, Search and Seizure

Assume the governorship two years from now? Who knows what would happen within these two years? How could Keane endure two years under the rule of Madame Wade?

“I think I already have the necessary ability.” Keane said firmly.

Madame Wade’s face turned slightly more solemn. “Keane, be calm. You are still only a child. The governor of the prefectural city of Cerre is in charge of hundreds of thousands of citizens. Right now, you aren’t capable of assuming this heavy responsibility.”

At this time, Jenne, who was next to Keane, spoke. “Aunt, imperial law makes no requirements with regards to a person having to be of the age of maturity before assuming a governorship.”

Madame Wade looked at Jenne.

Not backing down in the slightest, Jenne stared back at Madame Wade. The two women of different ages just stared at each other.

“True.” Madame Wade laughed. “Imperial law does not openly state that one must be of age before assuming the governorship of a city. However...”

Madame Wade seemed a bit saddened. “Not long ago, after your father passed away, when the clan learned about this news, they had originally planned to let your elder brother assume the governorship. But alas, my poor child...”

“After they learned that Keane was only fourteen, the clan ordered that as the prefectural city of Cerre was one of the important prefectural cities of the Northwest Administrative Province, and is located very close to the provincial capital of Basil [Ba’si’er], the management of Cerre is an important matter. The clan ordered that Keane must be of age before assuming the governorship.”

“The clan?”

Jenne and Keane were both startled.

Hearing this order from ‘the clan’, both Jenne and Keane were caught off-guard. As a collateral descendant of the Jacques [Jia’ke’si] clan, Jenne and Keane knew what it meant for the clan to issue an order.

“Aunt, did the clan truly issue such a decree?” Jenne stared at Madame Wade.

Madame Wade frowned as she looked at Jenne. “Jenne. Do you think I would dare to make a false decree on behalf of the clan? Mm. Before Keane is able to assume the governorship, all matters in the prefectural city are for me to manage.”

“As the future governor, I have the authority to select my own steward.” Keane called out unhappily.

Madame Wade stared coldly towards Keane.

Right at this time, Linley, who had been silent the entire time, suddenly spoke. “Madame Wade. The clan that you spoke of didn’t issue the order for you specifically to be the steward of the city on behalf of the governor, did they?”

Madame Wade was stunned.

No matter how daring she was, she didn’t dare to fabricate an order from the clan.

Jenne and Keane were both members of the Jacques clan by blood, while the Jacques clan itself was one of the most powerful, flourishing clans within the O’Brien Empire.

The entire Northwest Administrative Province, one of the seven great provinces of the O’Brien Empire, was under the management and control of the Jacques clan.

Jenne and Keane’s father, Wade Jacques, was only a collateral descendant of the Jacques clan, not a lineal descendant. If it wasn’t because of the support of the Jacques clan, how could a coward like Wade Jacques have assumed the position of city governor?

But now, Wade was dead.

In the eyes of the Jacques clan, the prefectural city of Cerre naturally would have to remain in the custody and management of the Jacques clan.

Although Madame Wade had married Wade Jacques, she herself did not, after all, carry any Jacques blood. It wasn’t likely that the Jacques clan would allow Madame Wade to assume the position of Stewart of the city of Cerre.

“Hmph, if it wasn’t for those old relics in the clan...” Madame Wade was inwardly hateful.

No matter how formidable Madame Wade was, there was no way she could compete against the clan. A single word from them could turn her, a noble lady, into a beggar.

“I’m not of the age of maturity yet, but my sister is. I will send people to the provincial capital of Basil. I trust that the elders of the clan will allow my sister to be the steward of the city, rather than you!”

Keane said forcefully.

There was no way that the enmity between Jenne, Keane, and Madame Wade could be resolved.

In just a few words, it had been totally exposed for everyone to see at this dinner. After all, Keane and Jenne’s mother had been hounded to her death by Madame Wade. Jenne and Keane, as well, had been the victim of repeated assassination attempts at Madame Wade’s orders on this trip.

“Fine. Fine. If you have the ability to do so, go ask the clan. I really want to see for myself if the clan will hand the stewardship of the prefectural city of Cerre to an eighteen year old girl!” Madame Wade raised her chin, speaking arrogantly.

Keane’s face was filled with stubbornness as well.

A young man at fourteen years of age was at his most rebellious. The more arrogant Madame Wade was, the more Keane would retaliate against her. Keane believed that the clan would definitely stand on his side. He was, after all, a member of the clan.

After the dinner banquet.

Linley, Jenne, Lambert, and Keane were all together. After asking a few questions, Linley finally realized how enormous and powerful the Jacques clan of Jenne and Keane was.

And their father, Wade Jacques, was nothing more than a collateral descendant and not part of the ruling line.

The true ruling branch of the clan had an astonishing amount of power. The entire Northwest Administrative Province was under their control, and what's more, the control was hereditary. The Jacques clan had already managed the Northwest Administrative Province for around a thousand years.

"The imperial clan of the O'Brien Empire really is very confident, to allow a single clan to manage one of his provinces for a thousand years." Linley sighed in amazement.

The amount of territory a province controlled was greater than the amount of territory the Kingdom of Fenlai had.

To allow a clan to manage a province for so long was to allow a clan to easily accumulate an astonishing amount of power. This was a common reason for eventual rebellion and an empire breaking down.

But the imperial clan of the O'Brien Empire was extremely confident.

Because...they had the War God, as well as the large number of powerful combatants of the War God's College. Additionally, the two most important administrative provinces in the O'Brien Empire, the 'Central Administrative Province' and the 'O'Brien Administrative Province', were both under the control of the imperial clan.

"As long as the War God is present, not a single clan dares rebel. Even if the War God doesn't intervene, the disciples his War God's College had admitted over the past thousands of years now constitute an astonishingly formidable force."

Linley understood.

In the face of absolute power, those so-called armies were just a joke. Armies were only used as a show of force for the commoners. Only Saint-level combatants could truly determine the fate of a nation.

"The Jacques clan must be extremely powerful, after having managed the Northwest Administrative Province for a thousand years." Linley said to himself.

"Hmph, that venomous woman. I refuse to believe the clan will support her." Keane said angrily.

Lambert only chuckled. "Young master, don't worry. If the clan were likely to support her, she wouldn't have acted the way she did tonight."

Indeed.

Right now, Madame Wade was both very angry and very frustrated. "How dare those two countryside siblings be so wild and arrogant? It's a pity that I didn't send someone to kill them years ago. If I had, I wouldn't have so many problems today."

In the past, Madame Wade had believed that her own son was sure to be the next governor of the prefectural city of Cerre.

But she didn't expect that her son would die so early.

"Holmer, that fool. Three hundred years of life were wasted on an idiot." Cold light glittered in Madame Wade's eyes. "Over the course of three hundred years, Holmer must have accumulated quite a bit of wealth."

....

Late night. Cerre City was very peaceful.

Holmer's residence was located in the east district of Cerre. It took up an extremely large amount of land, and had many beautiful female servants. Holmer was quite a lecherous man.

Suddenly, many hoof steps could be heard.

Two guards at the gate of Holmer's residence looked suspiciously towards the outside. Instantly, their faces turned pale. A large number of armored city guards had clustered around the main gate.

"Open the gate." A tall, arrogant knight clad in white metal armor and riding a fine stallion called out loudly.

Madame Wade and her two elder brothers were there as well, smiling as they watched. Holmer's clan didn't have any experts. With his death, his clan had become a piece of fresh meat which anyone could take.

The main gate slowly opened.

"Milords, why have you come here so late at night?" A middle-aged man ran out in a state of partial undress. He had just come running from his bed.

"Madame Countess." He suddenly saw Madame Wade was here, and his heart instantly shook.

Madame Wade said coldly, "Based on our evidence, Holmer is under suspicion of having attempted to assassinate Keane, the successor to the governorship of Cerre. All members of Holmer's clan are to be arrested, and all of the clan's possessions are to be searched and seized."

Hearing these words, the man's legs couldn't help but feel soft, and he fell to his knees.

"No! Madame Countess." The middle-aged man said hurriedly. "My grandfather was invited by your two brothers..."

"You dare to slander a noble clan? Your crimes increase a level in severity. Kill him." Madame Wade's face turned cold.

The leading knight suddenly thrust forward with his lance, striking like a serpent from its lair. With a 'swish' sound, the lance pierced through the throat of that middle-aged man.

Madame Wade's eldest brother, putting on a brave display, called out loudly, "Everyone, hurry up!"

Those city guards immediately charged into the manor like a pack of ravenous wolves and tigers. The thing which these city guards loved to do the most was search and seizures. Because when they carried these activities out, they would always be able to secretly take a few things for themselves.

But of course, they wouldn't dare take too much, as many people were present and watching.

"What are you doing? What are you doing?!"

A hastily dressed man and woman rushed out, shouting loudly. Some of the manor guards also hefted their weapons, but none of them dared to act.

Because...they could tell that these were the city guards.

How would the private guards of a manor dare to struggle against the city guards?

“Holmer is under suspicion of having attempted to kill young master Keane. All members of Holmer’s clan are to be arrested. Those who resist, kill them.” The knight leader said coldly. When the members of Holmer’s clan heard this order, they were all stunned.

In the face of the assault by the ferocious city guards, many people were taken without a struggle.

But there were still a number of people who were unwilling to surrender, and they turned tail to flee. The soldiers of the city guard chased after them, one by one.

“That Wade-whore.” A white-haired old man said. “She asked Grandpa to help her. Now that Grandpa is dead, she’s actually coming to ransack our manor. How venomous.”

That white-haired old man left a secret room, holding three magicrystal cards.

Holmer was three hundred years old. Of his sons, only two were still alive; the other had died of old age. The two remaining sons were the youngest ones. As for grandsons...the oldest grandchildren of his were two hundred, while the youngest were only around thirty.

“Stop!” A city guard suddenly noticed the old man.

The old man threw a handful of dust out.

“Uhhhh.” The guard’s face immediately turned blue. He grabbed at his throat, emitting several pained noises, then collapsed. He was dead.

With a sneer, the old man very agilely ran towards a small alleyway.

“Hold it!” A loud shout from far away.

The old man didn’t pay it any heed, increasing his speed instead.

“Swish.” An arrow pierced through the air at astonishing speed, howling as it pierced into the old man’s back.

The handsome, golden-haired knight lowered his bow. With a cold laugh, he said, “You thought you could run? In your dreams. Go search his body and see if he has any magicrystal cards.”

“Yes, milord.”

....

Not only was the manor itself filled with people; a large ring had formed around the manor as well. Not a single member of Holmer’s clan had been able to flee. Although some members of the clan knew how to use poison, they were far inferior to Holmer.

Within the main hall of Holmer’s manor.

Madame Wade and her two brothers were staring at a pile of treasure and magicrystal cards.

“This old fart’s money-making abilities were quite impressive.” Madame Wade’s older brother’s eyes were gleaming.

Madame Wade laughed calmly. “The two of you shouldn’t lust after a small amount like this. When we take over control of the city’s governorship, our wealth will be far greater than this.”

In the air, high above Holmer's manor.

Linley had a pair of translucent wings on his back. He was flying in the air, watching the looting and ransacking scene below in Holmer's manor.

"Madame Wade really is vicious and ruthless. This Holmer really is quite unfortunate." In mid-air, Linley laughed calmly as he watched all of this happen.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 20, The Summer Inferno

This had been a peaceful night. The miserable screams of the people of Holmer's clan being slaughtered were thus all the more jarring to the ear. Those sounds had travelled very far. Even Jenne and Keane, who were within the castle, could hear them.

"What is that?"

Keane ran out dressed in his sleepwear, while Jenne came out with her hair undone. The two siblings curiously walked out towards the direction of the castle gates. As for the extremely cautious old servant, Lambert, he had run to the castle gates already.

"By the Madame's orders, no one is permitted to leave the castle at night."

Two castle guards standing at the gate formed a cross with their spears, forbidding entry, as they spoke coldly to Lambert.

"What is going on? The two of you, move!" Keane snapped at them.

Seeing that Keane and Jenne had come, the two castle guards exchanged glances. Everyone in the castle knew that Keane was the successor to the governorship, but at the same time, Madame Wade wasn't going to easily give up her power.

"Young master Keane, Miss Jenne. We are very sorry, but the Madame has ordered that no one is to leave the castle at night. Please go back and rest." The taller of the two guards spoke.

Keane's face turned cold. "Out of my way."

The taller guard didn't budge. He only begged painfully, "Young master Keane, please don't make things difficult for us. If you force us to let you pass, you'll be killing us. We really can't afford to disobey the Madame's orders."

Keane was boiling with rage.

By his side, Jenne said to him, "Enough, Keane. Let's not make things difficult for them. They are in a very pitiable situation."

"Thank you, Miss Jenne! Thank you, Miss Jenne!" Those two guards hurriedly said. In their hearts, they felt very grateful to Jenne. Jenne was as beautiful as a holy angel, and she possessed a kindly soul as well.

Jenne asked gently, "May I ask, what exactly happened outside? I heard screaming. It seems as though there was some sort of disaster in the east district of the city."

The taller guard said in a low voice, "Miss Jenne, not too long ago, the Madame led a group of people out of the castle, and quite a large number of city guards passed through as well."

"Aunt? City guards?" Jenne and Keane were both confused.

Why was Madame Wade leading a large group of city guards so late at night?

“Miss, young master. Let’s sit down and rest for now.” Lambert pointed at a nearby stone bench. Jenne and Keane nodded, then walked over, the three of them sitting down.

Jenne, Keane, and Lambert were all extremely irritated.

Madame Wade’s existence was like having a fishbone stuck in their throats, causing them a great deal of misery.

“That damn woman wants to use me not being of age as an excuse to try and force me to wait two years. Hrmph. Two years. Within those two years, I probably would have been killed by her long ago.” Keane cursed in a low voice.

Jenne nodded as well.

The two siblings knew very well that they couldn’t allow Madame Wade to continue to act as she pleased.

“Young miss, young master. The senior madame has been in charge of Cerre for quite a long time. The city guards as well as the castle guards all obey her orders. The senior madame’s prestige is at a very high level. If young master Keane is unable to become the governor, it really will be very hard for us to fight against her. After all...there are too few people here who whole-heartedly support us.” Lambert was very resigned.

Jenne, Keane, and Lambert were all silent.

Within Cerre, there were very few people who supported them. Perhaps even if there were people who supported them, they wouldn’t dare to do so openly. In the prefectural city of Cerre, Madame Wade was like a local tyrant.

“Whoosh.”

A wind began to blow.

“Who is it?!” The two gate guards cautiously raised their heads, and saw a man dressed in a black warrior’s outfit and wearing a heavy black sword on his back descend from the air.

“Me.” Linley looked backwards at the guards.

Instantly, the two guards no longer dared to speak. They had heard of how powerful Linley was. At these guards’ level of power, they couldn’t even dream of stopping Linley.

“Big brother Ley.” Jenne and Keane stood up.

Linley turned to look at them.

Summer was just starting, and the temperatures at night were still fairly high. Keane and Jenne were only dressed in simple sleepwear, and their hair was all mussed.

“Big brother Ley, what exactly is going on outside? Why is it so noisy?” Keane looked at Linley and asked.

Linley said casually, “Madame Wade led a group of city guards to Holmer’s clan manor and launched a search and seizure operation. Tell me, how could it not be noisy?”

“Search and seizure?” Jenne and Keane were stunned.

“Holmer’s clan?” Lambert was greatly shocked as well.

Linley casually sat down on another end of the long bench. Laughing, he said, “Just wait and rest here for a bit. Very soon, you’ll hear some good news.”

“Good news? Can it be that she intends to give us the money she’s seized from that bastard?” Keane cursed quietly.

“BOOM!”

Right at this moment, a thunderous explosion could be heard from the east. The explosive sound was so noisy, it sounded like several dozen thunderbolts going off at once. This explosion probably woke up at least half of the residents of Cerre City.

“What was that?” Jenne, Keane, and Lambert jumped to their feet in shock.

The nearby guards, as well as the castle servants and female attendants all stared eastwards as well, and as they did, they saw that blazing flames were rising into the sky from the east.

“How could there be such a large inferno? And where did that explosion come from?” Linley looked questioningly towards the east as well.

All of the people in the castle were mystified. They all waited quietly for the city guards to return, as well as Madame Wade. Perhaps they would know what was causing that huge inferno in the east, or that massive explosion.

After a while...

A chorus of hoof steps could be heard outside the castle, followed by countless shouts. Immediately following these shouts were a series of frantic knocking sounds from the gate that came as quickly as rain drops in a storm.

“Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!”

The knocking sounds were frantic and ringing.

“Open the door, quick!” Angry roars could be heard from outside the castle gates.

The two gate guards didn’t dare to hesitate. They immediately opened the castle gates, as Linley, Lambert, Jenne, and Keane watched.

Once the castle doors were opened, they saw that in front of the castle were a large number of knights as well as heroic warriors. Their leader was a golden-haired man who was wielding a spear.

“Out of my way!” The golden-haired man roared to the two gate guards.

But upon seeing Keane and Jenne, the golden-haired man started, then immediately said with respect, “Deputy Commander Ritter [Li’tē] of the city guards pays his respect to Miss Jenne and young master Keane.”

Deputy Commander Ritter could be considered the second highest ranking person in the city guard. Not too long ago, he had participated in that welcoming banquet. Naturally, he recognized Jenne and Keane.

“Mr. Ritter. What happened, to cause all of you to be so frantic?” Keane spoke.

Ritter immediately fell to one knee. He painfully said, “Young master Keane. Forgive me for being useless in my protective responsibilities. Madame Wade and her two brothers died in the explosion just now.”

“Oh.....ah!?”

Keane’s eyes immediately bulged out, and Jenne and Lambert were greatly shocked as well. Disbelief painted the faces of all of the nearby guards as well.

Madame Wade had died.

Just as Keane and Jenne were worrying about her, Madame Wade and her two brothers had suddenly both died. Her death only filled the hearts of Jenne and Keane with joy.

Jenne and Keane glanced at each other, their eyes filled with wild joy.

“What exactly happened? Explain clearly.” Keane adopted the attitude and posture of a superior lecturing a subordinate.

The golden-haired Ritter immediately replied, “Your subordinate led several hundred members of the city guard, under the command of the Madame Countess, to launch a search and seizure operation of Holmer’s manor.”

“After we finished the search and seizure operation, Madame Countess ordered that all the treasures of the Holmer clan be placed within the main hall, then ordered all of us soldiers to leave, leaving behind just her and her two brothers in that hall.”

Hearing this, Keane couldn’t help but quietly curse, “That bitch really is shameless.”

Ritter continued, “We were stationed outside capturing the escaping members of the Holmer clan, but who would’ve thought that suddenly, the Holmer clan’s manor would catch fire. As soon as it did, everyone charged into rescue the Madame Countess.”

“But we hadn’t even made our way inside before we heard that terrifying explosion. Half of the building suddenly blew up and was destroyed.”

Ritter said painfully, “By the time we reached Madame Countess and the other two, we found only their bodies, which had already been blown apart by the blast. All three of them were dead.”

“Fine. Order people to bring my aunt’s corpse here, then go back and rest.” Keane directly ordered.

“Yes sir.” Ritter immediately issued the order.

Everyone all understood that with Madame Wade’s death, all of the authority in the prefectural city of Cerre now rested with this fourteen year old boy.

Everyone watched as Ritter’s men brought the charred, blasted remnants of the corpses inside.

Only now did Keane and Jenne totally believe...that it wasn’t just a dream. That detestable Madame Wade had truly died. From this day forward, their lives would no longer be lived in fear.

“Big brother Ley.” Jenne suddenly came to her senses. She turned to look at Linley. “Thank you.”

Lambert only now understood as well. Looking at Linley, he said with gratitude, “Mr. Ley, the good news you wanted us to hear truly was excellent news. It was the best type of news, the news that we’ve been saved.”

“What are you talking about?”

Keane was flabbergasted. “What do you mean by mumbling about good news and excellent news? OH!!!”

Finally, Keane understood as well.

“Big brother Ley, just now, you came in from outside the castle?” Keane asked quietly.

“Yep.” Linley nodded.

“Then you...” A hint of a smile was on Keane’s face.

Linley began to chuckle as well. “Seeing how nervous and restless you all were, I helped you address the root of your troubles. Alright, time to go to bed and have a good sleep, so you’ll have the energy to take over the governance of this prefectural city.”

As he spoke, Linley turned and headed towards his own residence.

Lambert, Jenne, and Keane all were amazed. Staring at each other with shock and joy, they really wanted to scream with happiness. But of course, Madame Wade’s corpse was right next to them. It wouldn’t be appropriate for them to celebrate like that.

“Boss. It’s done?” Bebe was lying on the ground, his eyelids drooped sleepily.

Linley chuckled. “Yep. All done.”

To the current Linley, someone like Madame Wade wasn’t even qualified to be considered an ‘opponent’. Those small schemes that Madame Wade could come up with were nothing more than jokes to Linley.

Try whatever tricks you want. I’ll just straight up kill you and resolve the issue once and for all.

“Why was there an explosion?” Bebe asked curiously.

“How should I know?” Linley shook his head. “All I did was kill Madame Wade and her two brothers, then use some fire-style magic to set the manor on fire. Afterwards...I just rushed back alone. Who would’ve expected that as soon as I returned to the manor, there would be such an explosion?”

What Linley didn’t realize was that one of Holmer’s experimental laboratories was located in that building. Many strange and bizarre chemicals and experimental materials were stored in that room. When Linley set fire to that building, he also unknowingly set ablaze some special materials, resulting in that massive explosion.

“You don’t know?” Bebe was startled. “Oh. Then let’s go to bed.”

“Yep. Bedtime.”

Linley casually climbed into his bed, then went to sleep.

Madame Wade and her brothers had suddenly died, just like that, in one night. This news shook the prefectural city of Cerre like an earthquake. And, to Jenne and Keane, this joyous news made them so happy that they couldn’t sleep at all.

But to Linley, it was nothing more than a trifling matter.

Right now, the Holmer clan’s manor continued to blaze merrily into the night. Many of the local city guards were frantically trying to put out the fire....

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 21, Gift

The prefectural city of Cerre administrated around ten or so other cities, as well as a large number of villages and farmers. The total population it controlled was in the millions. It would be fair to say that the prefectural city of Cerre could be considered as equivalent to a Duchy.

And the city governor of the prefectural city of Cerre could be considered equivalent the Grand Duke of a Duchy!

“About to become the city governor of a prefectural city at just fourteen years of age. This really makes one feel envious.” In many of the hotels in Cerre, countless people were discussing this event.

Madame Wade and her brothers had suddenly died in that massive fire. This caused the somewhat complicated lines of power in Cerre to suddenly grow distinct and clear.

There was no longer any question.

Keane, who possessed the blood of the Jacques clan, would definitely assume the position of governor of the prefectural city of Cerre.

“That Madame Wade went in the middle of the night to ransack someone’s home, but she didn’t expect that she would lose her life as a result. What a farce.” A red-bearded old man grabbed a large flagon of wine, laughing loudly.

“Heard she was burnt to death.” Another nearby person said.

“How could she have been burnt to death? There were so many city guards around her. If she really was just burned by fire, the Madame Countess definitely would’ve been able to escape.” A skinny man suddenly lowered his voice. “Let me tell you a secret. Madame Countess and her brothers were first killed, and then their corpses were burnt by the fire.”

All the people nearby immediately turned to stare at him.

“This is the truth.” The skinny man said confidently.

“All of you are full of crap.” A burly man laughed coldly. “I’m an actual damn city guard, and I was there that night. Do you know more, or do I know more?”

That skinny man immediately laughed awkwardly. “Friend, I’m just kidding.”

“Madame Countess and her two brothers weren’t killed by fire. They probably died due to the blast.” The burly man said what he believed to be the truth. “Burnt to death? Wouldn’t they call for help? But the brothers in our squad didn’t hear a single cry for help the entire time. What most likely happened was that the sudden explosion instantly blew them apart, so they didn’t have any chance to cry for help.”

All the people nearby nodded, including the skinny man.

This explanation was a very logical one.

“Forget about Madame Wade. Right now, the city governors of Cerre are that pair of siblings.” The burly man took a deep drink of liquor, then spoke loudly.

.....

Indeed. Right now, the center of attention in the prefectural city of Cerre was that pair of previously unremarkable countryside-raised siblings, Jenne and Keane.

Within the castle of the prefectural city.

“Why are there so many?” Flipping through the list of gifts in front of him, Keane also looked at the gift-filled room. He couldn’t help but be stunned.

After Madame Wade’s death, all of the nobles of the city immediately wished to draw closer to Keane now. They gave him gifts, they gave him beautiful women, they gave him powerful guards...all of these nobles knew that given Keane’s young age, their clans would probably be under the direct control of Keane for the next century at least. Naturally, they had to have good relations with him.

“This isn’t that much.” Lambert shook his head.

Jenne and Keane stared at Lambert in surprise, while Linley sipped his tea at a nearby table.

“Grandpa Lambert, this isn’t a lot?” Jenne said with surprise.

Lambert shook his head. “Miss, young master. These gifts, all combined, are only worth a few hundred thousand gold coins. A few hundred thousand gold coins? Hrmph. Miss, young master, do you know how much the senior madame’s net worth was? I believe it was over ten million gold coins!”

“Over ten million gold coins?” Jenne and Keane were both stunned.

They had lived for so long in the countryside. When had they ever seen such wealth? Lambert, on the other hand, had followed their mother for many years. When he lived within the governor’s castle, he had seen many things.

“This is very normal. After managing millions of people for so many years, given the senior madame’s avaricious nature, it would be strange if she didn’t have ten million gold coins. Unfortunately, we’ve still yet to find where she hid her magicrystal card. Even if we found it...most likely, that magicrystal card was linked to the senior madame’s fingerprints. We wouldn’t be able to withdraw the money.” Lambert shook his head helplessly.

The rules that the Golden Bank of the Four Empires had set were all to the advantage of the Golden Bank of the Four Empires.

Once a magicrystal card had been imprinted with a fingerprint, only the owner of that fingerprint could access the contents. Even if others acquired the magicrystal card, it would be of no use to them.

Of course...

The owner of the magicrystal card could go to a physical branch and transfer their wealth to someone else.

But if that person were to suddenly die without initiating a transfer of funds, then the assets would be claimed in its entirety by the Golden Bank of the Four Empires. In truth, the Golden Bank of the Four Empires had no choice but to do this.

The amount of gold coins stored in magicrystal cards in the world was actually ten times greater than the amount of gold coins the Golden Bank physically possessed.

But how often would extremely wealthy people, who were in possession of at least a hundred million gold coins, actually go to the bank and physically withdraw a hundred million gold coins? Even if they managed to withdraw it, physically moving the money back would be a problem. This was one of the reasons why the Golden Bank of the Four Empires dared to issue so many magicrystal cards. At the same time, the bank didn't dare to indiscriminately issue them either, because the bank was jointly run by all four empires. And behind the empires was the War God O'Brien, as well as the longest living human expert, the High Priest. No one dared to act too rashly.

"Ten million gold coins, disappeared, just like that." Keane said painfully.

He really agonized for the loss of such a sum of money.

"Young master. Being a city governor isn't just about collecting money. You have to pay for the salaries of the city guards, to renovate the city, and so on. There are multiple expenses." Lambert added.

Keane started.

"Whaaaa? Being a city governor costs money?" Keane had no idea about this.

"That is why I said these few hundred thousand gold coins don't mean much. Fortunately, the prefectural city does have its own treasury, which should have a fair amount of money inside." Lambert said.

Keane rubbed his head. "Ah. It seems as though being city governor is quite complicated and quite burdensome."

"Sis." Keane looked hopefully at Jenne. "You have to help me out."

Jenne nodded honestly. "Keane, I'll definitely do my best to help." But this simple nod of the head was the beginning to a painful, painful life for Jenne.

Right now, neither Keane nor Jenne nor Lambert knew that while they were worrying over money, the tea-drinking Linley was in possession of an astonishing fortune that had been built up by a royal clan over thousands of years. Most likely, even their clan, the Jacques clan which had managed the Northwest Administrative Province for a thousand years, couldn't match Linley for wealth.

After all, no matter how money-grubbing they were, they couldn't out-compete the royal clan of a kingdom.

"Jenne, Keane." Linley suddenly spoke. "You guys can stay here. I need to go train."

Jenne and Keane both looked at Linley. Keane chortled, "Big brother Ley, don't spend too much time training tonight. You have to remember to come for dinner. Tonight...my sister is going to personally cook."

Jenne immediately blushed.

Ever since the night of the banquet, when Keane had openly said that Linley was Jenne's fiancé, all of the citizens of the prefectural city of Cerre had really come to believe this was the case. Even the servants believe it. Naturally, this made Jenne quite embarrassed.

"Oh, right." Linley waved his hand with a smile.

Suddenly, in front of the courtyard, four large chests appeared out of nowhere. The chests were all open, and they were filled with all sorts of artworks, valuable magicite cores, and some rare, highly precious materials.

“What is this?” Keane and Jenne were both stunned.

“These are the possessions of Holmer’s clan. I’m not too sure what the valuation of these four chests is. Most likely, over a million gold coins. Take these as well.” Linley took out eight magiccrystal cards. “These are the un-imprinted magiccrystal cards of Holmer’s clan. There’s eight cards in total. Each of them should have a million gold coins stored within.”

Linley had overheard this information from Madame Wade’s conversation with her two brothers. Only then had he learned about the value of these magiccrystal cards.

“This...this...” Keane and Jenne, and even Lambert, stared at Linley in shock.

“All combined, this should be worth nearly ten million gold coins, right? With these...you won’t have to be too stingy and tight-fisted in managing the prefectural city of Cerre. Alright, time for me to go train.”

Linley casually tossed the eight magiccrystal cards into the chests, then turned and left.

Jenne, Keane, and Lambert all stared at the four chests, as well as the eight runed magiccrystal cards. They didn’t know what to say.

“Sis.” Keane looked at Jenne.

Jenne was stunned. “Originally, when I asked big brother Ley to help us, I said I would give him ten thousand gold coins. This...”

The two siblings really had no idea as to what they should say. They had offered ten thousand gold to Linley to ask him to help them out, but he only took a single gold coin...and now, gave them this fortune worth ten million gold coins!

Ten million gold coins!

This was an extremely amazing fortune.

When the Debs clan of the Kingdom of Fenlai was at its most flourishing, its net worth was only around a hundred million gold coins. After the repercussions of the smuggling affair, their net worth dropped to around ten million gold coins, but despite that, they were still a major clan of Fenlai.

“Miss, young master, this Mr. Ley really is no ordinary person.” Lambert’s expression was very solemn.

Jenne and Keane both nodded.

That went without saying. How could an ordinary person so casually toss out ten million gold coins?

“Just then, when Mr. Ley waved his hands, these four chests appeared out of nowhere. If my prediction is correct...Mr. Ley is in possession of a legendary interspatial ring!” Lambert’s face was extremely serious.

“An interspatial ring?” Jenne and Keane had never even heard of such a thing.

Lambert nodded. “Right. Interspatial rings are priceless treasures. In the Yulan continent, they are a proof of one’s stature and power. In the legends that I have heard, even when people offered to buy one for hundreds of millions of gold coins, no one has ever been willing to sell one.”

“Hundreds of millions of gold coins?!” Jenne and Keane were wide-eyed.

What would hundreds of millions of gold coins look like if you put them all in one place? They didn't even dare imagine what an enormous fortune like that would look like.

"In the entire Northwest Administrative Province, only the legendary clan leader of the Jacques clan, the governor for the entire province, has an interspatial ring." Having been in the prefectural city of Cerre for many years, Lambert knew quite a bit about the affairs of the Jacques clan.

"Are you talking about...Great-Grandfather McKenzie [Mai'ke'kan]?" Keane immediately said.

The two greatest source of pride for the Jacques clan was their first clan leader, Jacques, and their legendary clan leader, McKenzie Jacques.

In the past Jacques had been an ordinary commoner. He ended up joining the army, and was continuously promoted through the ranks, and also made major contributions to the O'Brien Empire. In the end, he even founded a new legion for the O'Brien Empire; the Jacques Legion.

As Jacques grew famous, he founded his own Jacques clan.

The Emperor even gave the Northwest Administrative Province to Jacques for his clan to manage. From this, one could tell how greatly Jacques was favored by the imperial clan.

But of course...the first clan leader was famous because of his military abilities in leading armies. With regards to how personally powerful he was, up till his dying day, he still was still just a warrior of the eighth rank.

But McKenzie Jacques was the pride of the clan. Over fifty years ago, McKenzie had entered the Saint-level before the age of two hundred.

A Saint-level combatant!

Once a clan produced a Saint-level combatant, so long as that combatant didn't perish and the clan didn't rebel, the clan's glory would never diminish.

"Great-Grandfather McKenzie, has an interspatial ring?" Keane was surprised.

"Right. And he has one only because in the past, his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor himself, personally gifted it to him." Lambert said emotionally. "The Jacques clan has always been proud of this fact. You must understand, even many of kings of various kingdoms in the Yulan continent do not possess an interspatial ring."

Only now did Jenne and Keane completely understand how rare and valuable these interspatial rings were.

"But I didn't expect...that Mr. Ley would also be in possession of an interspatial ring. No wonder...no wonder ten million gold coins was nothing to him."

Jenne and Keane felt as though they couldn't breathe.

"I thought I had a very high rank as the successor to the city governorship. I thought I could give big brother Ley a really, really important official position to serve in. But it seems as though...big brother Ley..." Keane was now beginning to understand.

The governor of a prefectural city, to the ordinary people, was someone as high above them as the heavens were.

But to experts such as Linley, it was nothing at all. He could kill one whenever he wanted to.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 22, The Vast Earth

A month later, the order came down from the clan leader of the Jacques clan; Keane was to assume the position of city governor of the prefectural city of Cerre. However, prior to achieving the age of maturity, his sister, Jenne, was to assist him in managing the affairs of the city.

“Big brother Ley, you are leaving?”

Jenne, Keane, and Lambert all looked at Linley with astonishment.

With Keane the governor of Cerre and Jenne his steward, the two of them now had comparatively relaxed lives. Just as the two of them wanted to find a way to repay Linley, he suddenly declared his intention to depart from the prefectural city of Cerre.

“Big brother Ley.” Jenne’s eyes were starting to turn slightly red.

Linley was carrying his heavy sword, and Bebe was on his shoulders. By his side was Haeru, his Blackcloud Panther. Smiling, Linley said, “In this developed, urbanized environment within Cerre City, my training is negatively influenced. I won’t be going too far. I just intend to go to a valley in the mountains near Cerre City to quietly train for a time.”

To Linley, the most important thing was still training. Linley, who was still constantly improving himself, hadn’t yet reached a bottleneck, which made training all the more important. At a time like this, he had to seize the opportunity to raise his power as much as possible.

There were records of Dragonblood Warriors of the Baruch clan reaching the Saint-level and dominating the world in a matter of decades due to intensive training.

Experts had to be able to endure loneliness.

“Valley?” Jenne and Keane both inwardly let out sighs of relief.

“Alright, if I have some free time, I’ll come visit. I’ve already helped you as much as I can. In the future, you’ll have to rely on yourselves.” Linley said with a laugh.

When he looked at these two siblings, Keane and Jenne, Linley would often think of his own younger brother, Wharton. Right now, he and Wharton also had lost their parents.

“I wonder how Wharton is doing. After I finish understanding the level beyond ‘impose’, I’ll go pay him a visit.”

Linley knew very well that right now, over the course of Wharton’s training in the O’Brien Empire, there was no need for him to go disturb Wharton. In addition, only by learning on his own would Wharton grow fastest.

Once Linley was by Wharton’s side, Wharton would probably be unconsciously negatively impacted.

.....

East of Cerre, there was a vibrant, green mountain range with an unassuming little valley. Linley erected a wooden room here, then began to engage in quiet training.

Late at night, within the mountain valley. There was a green plain of grass, and even a little lake in the middle of it.

Linley was seated in a meditative trance close to the lake. His eyes were closed as he attuned himself to nature. By his side, there was a lit campfire, casting a flickering light across Linley's face.

Linley could feel the expansiveness of the vast earth, the flows of the wind, and the streams of water. He could feel the passion of the flames...

As a magus, especially one with exceptional affinity for both wind and earth elemental essence, Linley's ability to attune with nature was far superior to most warriors.

This was the reason why that ancestor of the Baruch clan who used a heavy warhammer as his weapon only managed to reach the level of 'impose' after entering the Saint-level. After all, it was harder for warriors to become one with nature, compared to magi.

"The 'Thunderbolt' technique learned when I reached the level of 'wielding something heavy as though it were light' contained explosive force, like the eruption of a volcano. As for the so-called 'impose', it contains the 'imposing force' of nature itself, of earth, fire, water, and wind. However..."

After meditating for a long time, Linley suddenly understood.

"The 'impose' level is merely an 'imposing force' that borrows from the strength of the surrounding, nearby nature. The level that is above 'impose' should be all-embracing. I need to pursue the most suitable avenue for this."

In the darkness of the night, Linley remained there in the meditative pose. His eyes then suddenly opened, and they were as resplendent as the stars in the night sky.

"Different weapons will need to be used in different ways. The strength of the heavy sword lies in its weight! As for this heavy sword, Bladeless, it naturally doesn't rely on a sharp edge. It openly relies on its tremendous weight and makes open, direct assaults."

Linley's spirit was dimly sensing something.

The principles of training with the heavy sword were very similar to the fundamental principles of the earth itself.

"The vast earth is dense and heavy. The vast earth is boundless. The vast earth is stable..." Linley was holding the adamantine heavy sword in his hands, but his heart had totally merged with the throbbing pulse of the earth.

The unique vibrating pulse of the earth had a one-of-a-kind, heart-shaking rhythm. Generally speaking, only people who had reached a very high level of attunement to the earth would sense it.

Linley rose to his feet.

He began to silently wield the adamantine heavy sword about. As the adamantine heavy sword danced about, Linley's own movements and the movements of his sword began to enter into a certain unique rhythm.

This was a rhythm that was like the pulse of one's heart.

“Whoosh.”

The adamantine heavy sword seemed to carry a million pounds of force, as it heavily slashed through the air again and again. As Linley swung his heavy sword repeatedly, he felt as though he had totally become one with the earth. Just by training with his heavy sword, he felt as though he himself now carried the weight of the earth.

“Boom.”

Linley’s heavy adamantine sword suddenly pierced directly up into the air. Several explosive booms could be heard in succession. This empty stab upwards had caused the air itself to explode. This was inconceivable! This was because no matter how fast a weapon could move, it could at most cause a single sonic boom. To cause multiple sonic booms was virtually impossible.

“Hrm?” Linley’s eyes suddenly lit up.

But just like that, upon becoming distracted, Linley was no longer absorbed with that near-miraculous feeling of being one with nature.

“What happened just then? I didn’t use any battle-qi, but my power split into multiple rhythmic pulses in that attack.”

Linley began to ponder this question.

When in the middle of training, people would sometimes enter into a certain state and reach an astonishing level of power. But if they weren’t able to totally understand that state they had entered, they wouldn’t be able to wield its power again so easily.

What Linley needed to do now was to constantly ponder and constantly train.

He needed to master everything and be in complete control!

.....

The sky was ocean-blue, a pure azure color without a hint of other colors. A few beautiful, lazy clouds drifted across it. Linley’s life in the valley was indeed very quiet.

The blowing wind. The rippling lake.

Right now, Linley wasn’t training. He was fishing in the valley lake. A person couldn’t always be training; if they did, it could actually be counter-productive.

If he wanted to go fishing, he would. If he wanted to go to sleep, he would.

His heart had become one with the world, one with nature.

When he did train, this made his rate of improvement extremely high.

“Big brother Ley.” From outside the valley, a happy voice could be heard. Linley turned and saw Jenne on a fine stallion. Behind her, there were two pretty female servants on horses. These two female servants were clearly quite talented, as their movements on their horses were those of practiced riders.

“Jenne.” Linley put down his fishing pole and stood up.

Neither Bebe nor Haeru were currently present. The two of them would often go deeper into the mountains to hunt for wild beasts to eat. The beasts in this mountain range Linley had chosen to stay in were all ordinary animals. Magical beasts were extremely rare.

“Big brother Ley, these are some of the dishes that I prepared.” Jenne removed a package from the back of her horse. The package was well wrapped. “You definitely can’t have been eating too well here. Come, big brother Ley, have a good taste.”

Jenne unwrapped the package, one layer at a time. Inside was a metal box, which was filled with all sorts of dishes as well as rice.

Linley took a sniff.

“Mmm. It really does smell good.” Linley laughed.

Jenne’s face immediately turned red with excitement.

But in his heart, Linley was sighing. How could Linley not tell how Jenne felt? In terms of both appearance as well as temperament, Jenne was all but perfect. But having experienced so much, it was hard for Linley to open the depths of his hearts and let anyone else in.

“Love?”

Linley sighed to himself.

He didn’t have any interest in affairs of the heart. The most important thing for now was to focus on his training. Right at this moment, a scene couldn’t help but suddenly flash through Linley’s mind.

After Linley’s father had died, all the nobles had come to pay their respects at Wushan township. That night, Delia had come to visit him. She had wanted to tell Linley that she was returning to the Yulan Empire. And that night, before she had left...Delia had kissed him.

“Delia?”

Aside from Alice, perhaps the only person Linley felt some romantic affection towards was this girl whom he had known since his very first year at the Ernst Institute, especially after the open displays of affection Delia had shown him. Although Linley had never admitted it openly, in his heart, Delia’s image had been engraved in his mind.

“Big brother Ley, eat up!” Jenne said hopefully.

Linley sighed to himself. “I can’t let Jenne waste her youth like this.” As he thought to himself, Linley began to eat heartily while praising, “This really is excellent. The taste is wonderful.”

Hearing Linley’s praise, Jenne was all smiles.

“Jenne, in the future, though, you don’t need to come visit me. When I am training, I don’t like to be disturbed.” Linley said to Jenne.

Jenne was startled.

“Oh.” Jenne mumbled, then she squeezed out a smile. “Then when you have some free time, big brother Ley, come visit us in the castle.”

“Sure.” Linley could only respond affirmatively.

....

The days of Linley training in the mountain valley passed by very quickly. In the blink of an eye, over a month had passed. With regards to how to properly use his adamantine heavy sword, Linley had gradually begun to find the proper path.

So long as he persevered down this path, in a few years time, he definitely would be able to reach a new level that was beyond the 'impose' level!

....

Within a secluded hotel in the prefectural city of Cerre.

This hotel was very dimly lit, and the atmosphere tended towards the dark, giving the impression of dusk. Each table was arranged in a very orderly manner, and between each booth, there was a screen.

This was a very quiet hotel with a great deal of atmosphere. The first time Linley had come here, he had taken a liking to it.

The expenses here were fairly high as well.

While he was training, generally speaking, every seven or eight days, Linley would come here and drink wine while listening to the elegant, beautiful music of the hotel. Every so often, he would hear some gossip from travelers.

"It's almost July. Wharton's school year should be starting soon." Linley thought to himself.

Right now, there were quite a few customers in this hotel. All of the customers engaged in conversations were quite conscientiously lowering their voices as they spoke, but when Linley focused, he could clearly hear every word of every conversation they were having.

Suddenly, a quiet conversation attracted Linley's attention.

"Have you heard? In the imperial capital, an incredible genius has emerged. A seventeen year old named 'Wharton'." On a table next to Linley, there were three middle-aged men. They were discussing the various geniuses of the empire.

Wharton?

Linley focused his attention on them.

After having spent so much time in the O'Brien Empire, Linley had yet to learn anything regarding Wharton.

"Are you talking about that genius who popped up out of nowhere in the O'Brien Academy?" The bald man's eyes lit up. "I've heard of him too. The end-of-the-year competitions for students of the seventh grade always receive a great deal of attention. Even some students who have reached the eighth rank will participate on occasion."

As the number one warrior academy of the Yulan continent, the O'Brien Academy was divided into seven grades.

Upon reaching the seventh rank, a warrior was admitted into the seventh grade.

A warrior of the seventh rank was qualified to graduate, but many of them still elected to stay in the academy. Even some warriors of the eighth rank were in no hurry to graduate.

“Old bald vulture, you’ve heard this news as well? That Wharton is really...wow.” A jade-haired middle-aged man sighed. “Only seventeen years old. In the past, he had never participated in any of the yearly competitions. This time, when he took part in the seventh grade competition, he actually defeated a warrior of the eighth rank to become the champion of the seventh grade class.”

“What? A seventeen year old who defeated a warrior of the eighth rank? Are you serious? Is this real?” A pudgy man who had only been listening up till now suddenly spoke in shock.

The bald man glanced at him. “Of course it’s real. I personally witnessed it. You have no idea. This Wharton was around two meters tall and extremely powerfully built. His physical presence alone exerts tremendous pressure on people. His weapon of choice is an extremely terrifying giant warblade. Wielding that warblade, that Wharton was actually able to defeat a warrior of the eighth rank to become the champion of the seventh grade class.”

“From what I heard, for this Wharton to already be able to defeat a warrior of the eighth rank now means that he most likely will be able to reach the eighth rank himself by age twenty. In the past, the Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier, reached the ninth rank when he was thirty. This Wharton’s natural ability isn’t too far off.” The jade-haired man praised as well, “For a seventeen year old to be able to defeat a warrior of the eighth rank is amazing. It has been a long time since the empire has produced a genius like this. He’s even been publicly acknowledged as the number one genius of the O’Brien Academy, and the Emperor has already conferred upon him the title of Count.”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 23, The Cardinal

The fat man said questioningly, “Hey, according to what you two are saying, someone like this Wharton should’ve become famous a long time ago. Why hadn’t anyone heard of him until now?”

The bald man nodded. “I was suspicious about this question as well, so I did some investigating. This Wharton, in all his time at the O’Brien Empire, had never participated in the yearly tournaments, nor did he ever duel against any experts. That’s why he didn’t have any fame at all.”

“To have power but not reveal it.” The jade-haired man and the fat man both sighed in appreciation.

“Forget about the past.” The bald man was very confident. “After this seventh grade tournament at the O’Brien Academy, this Wharton is going to be the center of attention.”

Within that secluded little hotel, Linley continued to sip his wine. There was a hint of a smile on his face.

“Little Wharton is two meters tall? That’s a bit taller than me.”

When Wharton left Wushan township, he had only been six years old. At the time, he still had his baby teeth, and was very adorable. In the blink of an eye, eleven years had passed.

“Little Wharton!”

A warm feeling swelled in Linley’s heart. This was the affection and bond between siblings.

“Little Wharton’s density of Dragonblood in his veins is even higher than mine. His natural talent as a warrior is higher than me as well. He defeated warriors of the eighth rank at age seventeen? Mm...I expect Wharton should have reached the seventh rank at least two or three years ago.”

Linley’s guesses were absolutely correct.

That year, the six year old Wharton had followed Housekeeper Hiri on the long, winding road to the O’Brien Empire. Given Wharton’s natural ability, it was easy for him to enter the O’Brien Academy.

But Housekeeper Hiri understood that the Baruch clan still belonged to the Holy Union. Thus, all this time, he had made sure that Wharton would conceal his true strength and not reveal it. If Wharton shone too brightly, after graduation, the O’Brien Academy wouldn’t easily allow him to return to the Holy Union.

Thus, per Housekeeper Hiri’s guidance, this entire time Wharton had been concealing his strength. Although he had revealed a little when he was a child, at that time he was too young and thus no one paid attention. Once he grew up and matured, he naturally understood the importance of concealing himself.

Long years of hard training.

At the O’Brien Academy, the top warrior academy of the most military powerful empire in the world, Wharton’s rate of improvement had been quite rapid.

When Wharton turned fourteen, Hillman, per Linley’s instructions, had arrived at the O’Brien Academy.

Actually, by the time Hillman had arrived at the O'Brien Academy, the 'Apocalypse Day' had already happened long ago. The imperial clan and major noble clans of the O'Brien Empire all had their own unique communications systems and had known about it long ago. As the elite military academy of the O'Brien Empire, the O'Brien Academy naturally knew about this news as well.

When Hillman reached the empire, Wharton already knew that Apocalypse Day had occurred.

Hillman informed Wharton of the death of Hogg, as well as Linley's decision to seek revenge. Wharton was totally stunned. He had no idea what he should do.

With Hillman and Hiri at his side, and with the warblade 'Slaughterer' in his hands per Linley's bequeathing, Wharton made up his mind to assume the responsibilities of the clan. But in his heart, Wharton remained concerned for his big brother, Linley. Wharton didn't know what the situation was with Linley.

The distance from the Holy Union to the O'Brien Empire was simply too great. A one way journey would take at least a year.

Fortunately, afterwards the Dawson Conglomerate had gotten in contact with Wharton and sent him a secret letter.

That secret letter was written by Yale. It clearly described the enmity between Linley and Clayde, as well as the Radiant Church. It also informed Wharton that Linley was fine, but that he would embark on a long period of solo training.

After hearing this news, Wharton felt a bit more at ease.

Wharton felt all the more proud of his big brother, and that made him all the more determined to work hard, so that in the future, he would stand side-by-side with his brother. In the past, Wharton was already very hard working, but the three years after that, Wharton trained even harder. When he was fifteen years old, Wharton had reached the seventh rank as a warrior.

When he turned seventeen, Wharton believed that he had reached a certain level of attainment in the use of the warblade 'Slaughterer'. At that time, he made up his mind to participate in the yearly tournament. As a result of that participation, Wharton shocked the empire and became the most dazzling new star in the imperial capital. The Emperor himself had bestowed the title of Count upon him.

.....

Seated in the corner of the hotel, Linley was happier than he had been in a long time.

"Boss, Wharton? That's your little brother, right?" Bebe was curled up on a chair, staring at Linley with his beady little black eyes.

Laughing, Linley nodded.

"That little tyke can beat a warrior of the eighth rank?" Bebe sighed in surprise. "Boss, your little brother should be able to transform into a Dragonblood Warrior, right?"

"Naturally."

Linley was very proud of his younger brother Wharton. "Bebe, I transformed into a Dragonblood Warrior through drinking the dragon's blood of the Armored Razorback Wurm and agitating the Dragonblood in my veins. My younger brother has a higher density of Dragonblood in his veins. He can directly become a Dragonblood Warrior. But his Dragonform isn't the same as mine."

Linley clearly remembered how the Dragonform transformation was described in his clan's records.

Once the density of Dragonblood in one's veins was high enough, after one trained according to the Secret Dragonblood Manual, one could transform into a Dragonblood Warrior. Normally, a Dragonblood Warrior's body would be covered with azure draconic scales, have an azure draconic tail, and a single draconic horn sprouting from the forehead.

Linley's transformation, however, was a Dragonform covered with black scales and with black spikes piercing from his forehead, back spine, elbows, and knees, as well as a black tail.

"A bottle of Green Jadeite for each person!" A voice which Linley was familiar with rang out in the hotel.

"This is..."

Linley seemed to have been struck by lightning. His entire body turned stiff, and then he immediately said mentally to Bebe, "Bebe, come to me. Don't reveal yourself." Linley placed Bebe onto a chair in the corner of his little booth.

This hotel was very dimly lit.

What's more, every table was separated by a wooden screen. Linley's body was almost entirely blocked by that wooden screen, and so that familiar person didn't see Linley at all.

Linley turned his head to peek out just slightly...

That pudgy figure. Those eyes which turned into slits when beaming.

"It's him."

Linley immediately pulled his head back. "Cardinal Lampson. Why is he here in the O'Brien Empire? And those people by his side aren't weak either. What's more, one of them is one of the Ascetics who appeared at the highest level of the Radiant Temple that year."

Indeed, that Ascetic was one of the men who had worked with Heidens in setting up that magical formation. He was a powerful combatant.

There were at least two combatants of the ninth rank here; Lampson and the Ascetic.

"I don't recognize the others, but judging from their auras, they aren't much weaker than Lampson. Perhaps they are also experts of the ninth rank."

Linley's heart began to tremble.

"In a place such as the prefectural city of Cerre, why are so many experts of the Radiant Church present? Could it be...could it be that..." Linley's heart clenched. "Could it be that my identity has been revealed?"

Linley knew that an enormous organization such as the Holy Union definitely had intelligence networks in the various other kingdoms and empires. But could their intelligence network really have deeply penetrated even a place such as the prefectural city of Cerre?

"Boss, what's going on?" Bebe was still confused. Having been ordered by Linley into a corner, he had no idea what was going on.

Linley looked at Bebe, a hint of a smile on his lips. "Bebe, experts from the Radiant Church have arrived. There should be several combatants of the ninth rank."

“The Radiant Church?” A murderous look flashed in Bebe’s eyes.

“If they plan to act against me, I’ll make sure none of them leave Cerre alive.” Linley’s heart was filled with a killing intent as well. Linley’s current level of power was far greater than what it had been in the past.

When Dragonformed, his power was that of a warrior of the peak-stage ninth rank. And what’s more, with regards to the usage of his adamantine heavy sword, Linley had also reached the peak of the ‘impose’ level, and had just dimly begun to sense his way to an even higher level of attainment.

Linley listened carefully.

Those people from the Radiant Church hadn’t discovered Linley’s presence yet.

“For this fellow’s sake, we’ve spent two years. Finally, in another ten days or half month or so, we’ll be able to go back.” Lampson’s voice was very soft.

Lampson was very careful when he spoke as well, not giving any hint as to the identity of ‘this fellow’.

“Two years.” Another black-robed man whose back was facing Linley shook his head. “For the sake of dealing with that old fellow, several of my good friends have died.”

“As long as we capture him, it will all have been worth it.” Lampson said.

.....

Linley frowned as he listened to their conversation.

“What do they mean?”

He had indeed killed six Special Executors of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, but he definitely wasn’t an ‘old fellow’.

“Old fellow? And they are going back soon?” Linley was beginning to understand that these people were here, most likely for the purpose of dealing with that person.

Linley began to grow curious. Who, exactly, was worth the Radiant Church expending this much effort on?

“Old fellow, what are you staring at?” One of the black-robed men snapped quietly.

“Why the arrogance?” An ancient-sounding voice spoke out. “If it weren’t for the fact that you outnumbered me and used some tricks, how could I have fallen into your hands? What a joke.”

Linley’s eyelids twitched.

It seemed that the owner of this old voice was the person whom the Radiant Church desired to acquire.

“The Radiant Church didn’t send such a large number of experts to other countries to pursue and kill me. But they did for this old man...who exactly is he?”

Linley wondered to himself.

“No matter what, and no matter who this old man is, I’ll definitely rescue him.” Linley laughed coldly to himself. “Being able to disrupt the important plans of the Radiant Church will make myself feel a bit better.”

To totally destroy the Radiant Church and uproot it entirely was very hard.

Right now, he could only proceed one step at a time.

After waiting about half an hour, Lampson and his group of men finally left the hotel, taking the old man with them. From start to finish, Lampson and the people with him hadn't cast a single glance towards Linley, who had been hidden by his screen.

Linley walked out from his booth.

"Bebe, let's go." Linley casually tossed down a few gold pieces, immediately leading Bebe out of the hotel, following Lampson's group from behind.

Linley's understanding of the 'impose' level had already reached the peak of mastery. Just by using his knowledge of 'impose', Linley was able to stand on top of water without sinking down, something which most combatants of the ninth rank could not do. This was a higher level of understanding, which couldn't be accomplished simply through powerful physical strength or battle-qi.

Following behind Lampson's group, Linley finally managed to see who these people were.

"The Radiant Church has six people, along with that mysterious old man they have under guard." Linley had the sense that these six were all combatants of the ninth rank.

Six experts of the ninth rank, guarding and escorting a single old man. And with Cardinal Lampson personally leading the squad.

Hearing their conversation, it seemed that Cardinal Lampson's squad had spent two years on this assignment, and had lost quite a few people as well.

"Just who is this old man?" From behind, Linley managed to catch a glimpse of how the old man looked as well.

He was extremely skinny, and his white eyebrows were so long that they drooped down to his chest. Most importantly, this old man was shackled by the hands. Only, there was a piece of cloth wrapped around the manacles. Most people simply wouldn't notice it unless they had carefully inspected it. Even Linley had only noticed it after tailing them for a long time, and only because a gust of wind had temporarily blown the cloth wrapping aside for a moment.

"Hrm? Is that..." This was the first time Linley had seen this legendary tool. "Antimagic manacles?"

According to the records, anyone shackled by these antimagic manacles wouldn't be able to use any of the mageforce in their body. Even the most powerful of magi would be like an ordinary person. But these antimagic shackles were extremely expensive. This was the first time Linley had seen such a thing.

Linley slipped in and out of the crowds on the street, sometimes dodging, sometimes hiding. His movements were very graceful. Lampson and his men had no idea he was there at all.

After a while, Lampson and his men arrived at an alleyway. They stopped in front of a two-level residence. One of the black-robed men knocked on the door.

"Milord." The door to the residence opened, and a middle-aged man came out with a bow. "Everything is prepared. Milords, please come in and rest."

Lampson and the others nodded.

"Xartes [Ke'sa'te'si], you and your brother, stand guard on the old man. We will come relieve you later." Lampson instructed.

Linley secretly was startled. “Even shackled by antimagic manacles, they still intend to watch him this closely? This old man really is something special.” This made Linley desire to ruin the Radiant Church’s plans even more.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 24, Zassler

The sky slowly grew dark. Linley remained hidden outside the walls of this residence the entire time, but up till now, he still hadn't found any opportunity or method by which he could stealthily get near that mysterious old man.

"Based on their conversation in the hotel, the Radiant Church seems to have sacrificed several powerful experts for the sake of catching this person." Linley frowned as he considered the question. "This old man is at least of the ninth rank in power."

"But he shouldn't be at the Saint-level yet. Even a large group of powerful experts of the ninth rank could at most force the Saint-level to flee. It definitely is highly unlikely that they would seize him."

Although Linley wasn't too sure about exactly how powerful that mysterious old man was, without question, that mysterious old man had the ability to deal with multiple experts of the ninth rank.

"This old man must be very important for the Radiant Church to expend so much effort on catching him. I'll definitely disrupt their scheme." Linley's eyes were radiating a cold light. "But killing these six experts of the ninth rank and preventing a single one of them from escaping Cerre is a difficult task."

Linley himself was living quite close to Cerre. Naturally, he wouldn't want his movements and his presence to be exposed.

If he was to act, he would have to kill all six of them.

"Myself, Bebe, Haeru. We are totally capable of dealing with three combatants of the ninth rank. Against six...if we use some tactics, it still isn't out of the realm of possibility. However, it's best if we release the old man first and have him ally with us. That will give us an even greater chance of success."

Linley knew how to deal with antimagic manacles.

The power and value of antimagic manacles lay in the complicated magical rune formations etched onto them. But the materials which the manacles were made out of actually weren't that durable. Although antimagic manacles prevented the prisoner from using any mageforce and was fairly sturdy, Linley was totally confident in his ability to break them.

Linley wasn't in a rush. At this time, he mentally commanded Haeru to return to the city from within the mountain valley.

Humans and the magical beast companions they had tamed were spiritually bound. The more powerful the spiritual energy of the two was, the greater the distance the two could exchange mental conversations.

For example, Linley and Bebe could exchange thoughts from a distance of several hundred kilometers. But if they were to become separated from an even farther distance, it would no longer be possible.

As for some weak members of noble clans who used soul-binding scrolls to tame magical beasts of the first, second, or third ranks, they might not be able to communicate past a distance of just a few hundred meters.

The main issue was spiritual energy.

Linley and Haeru, as well, could spiritually communicate from a distance of hundreds of kilometers. But once the distance grew too great, they would only be able to vaguely sense the direction each was in, and could no longer send messages.

Darkness descended. It was approximately 9 o'clock at night now.

Dressed in a black warrior's outfit, Linley was hiding outside the walls of the residence, alongside the similarly black Shadowmouse, Bebe, as well as the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru. They were quietly waiting for their opportunity.

"Bebe, Haeru, the two of you stay here. Only make your move after I mentally command you two to act." Linley instructed.

Haeru and Bebe both nodded.

Linley immediately removed his black warrior's outfit, then allowed black scales to manifest on top of his skin. A black spike jutted forth from his forehead, and spikes jutted out along his entire back spine.

That draconic tail silently pierced through Linley's long pants.

Linley's eyes became a cold, merciless dark gold color.

"Remember. Await my order." Linley once again instructed Bebe and Haeru. And then, like a phantom in the darkness, Linley glided towards the courtyard.

After having mastered the 'impose' level, Linley could now move without causing any disturbance to the surrounding air.

The main building had two floors. Beside it were three rooms, the central one clearly being the place where the old man had been locked into. Because outside this room, there were two black-robed men.

Linley crept behind a manmade hill, not moving at all as he quietly awaited his opportunity.

"I refuse to believe you won't lose your focus for even a second." Linley was extremely patient.

Right now, the two black robed men were engaging in conversation out of boredom.

"Bro, after completing this mission, the two of us have to have a good, long rest. These past two years have exhausted us. I've been nervous this entire time, not daring to loosen up at all." One of the black haired men said.

"Right. On this mission, two of our Ascetics of the ninth rank died, and three Special Executors of the ninth rank as well. Eleven of us had to work together, aided by poison, and yet five of us still died. This old fellow is such a monster."

Right now, the two black-robed men were fairly relaxed.

In order to pursue and capture this old fellow, their group had been sent out as soon as the Radiant Church had received news of his whereabouts. They had passed through the O'Brien Empire, traversed the 48 Anarchic Duchies, and entered the great plains of the far east. They had battled against this mysterious old man for months, finally capturing him in one of the Duchies of the Anarchic Lands.

But as long as they had managed to seize this old man, all their sacrifices would have been worth it.

They were very careful on their way back as well. They were afraid that the experts of the O'Brien Empire would discover them. But by now, they were halfway back, and the towns they would pass by in the future were all small ones without many experts. They shouldn't pose much danger.

Naturally, Lampson and the others now felt slightly more relaxed.

"Bro, I'm going to the bathroom. You stand guard here. I'll be back in a minute." One of the black-robed men said.

The other black-robed man laughed. "I was fine before you said anything, but now that you mentioned going to the bathroom, I want to go as well. Fine, you go first, and I'll go later." Although they were a bit relaxed, they still didn't dare to have both guards be gone at the same time.

After all, if they let this old man escape, they would have committed a grave sin.

Hiding behind the manmade hill, when Linley saw the black-robed man leave, he felt a hint of surprised excitement. "Only one left. Killing him isn't a problem at all. Only...I can't let him make any noise."

Linley narrowed his eyes, while beginning to quietly mouth the words to a magical spell. 'Supersonic'.

.....

At this moment, Xartes was currently standing at his bedroom door, keeping a casual eye on his surroundings. In a mere prefectural city, Xartes, an expert of the ninth rank, still felt quite self-confident.

But suddenly, Xartes saw a black light flash in the corner of his eyes.

"What was that?" Xartes turned his head over to look.

An enormous bluish-black sword had suddenly appeared in his field of vision. The most terrifying thing was, this bluish-black sword seemed to be using all of the surrounding area to apply pressure and force on him, locking him into place!

Space itself had been totally locked!

Xartes wanted to cry out in alarm, but he couldn't make a sound. In truth, even if he had managed to shout, the sound wouldn't have managed to leak through that frozen space.

Xartes' eyes were round and bulging. Suddenly, he slammed his palm, now glowing with radiant battle-qi, in the direction of the sword.

"Bam!"

When the enormous sword struck Xartes' hand, Xartes felt as though he had suddenly slammed against a boundless, roiling flood. He wasn't able to suppress it at all.

"Boom." His hand and his arm disintegrated and liquefied, the bones in them shattering.

And then, not slowing down, the adamantine heavy sword struck Xartes on his chest. Xartes only felt his chest tremble, felt something break, and then...he felt nothing else.

In the blink of an eye. The opponent was killed.

He didn't have a chance. After Dragonforming, Linley was a peak-stage combatant of the ninth rank, and had the adamantine heavy sword for his weapon. At the same time, he had reached the realm of understanding and mastering the power of 'impose'. The two were on totally different levels.

"Hurry." Linley gently pushed the door open. As he did, he immediately saw that skinny old man with long white hair and the long white eyebrows, seated cross-legged on the floor. Hearing Linley enter, the old man casually opened his eyes while saying, "Why have you come..."

But upon seeing Linley, the old man's words immediately came to a halt.

Seeing Linley in full Dragonform, the old man stared at Linley. Lowering his voice, he said, "What plane of existence do you come from, Draconian?"

"Draconian?" Linley was startled.

Could it be that in other planes, there was a race called Draconians that looked similar to him?

"Why have you come here?" The old man said again in that quiet voice.

"To save you."

Linley was wielding his adamantine heavy sword. "Hold your arms out straight. I will break your antimagic manacles."

Although the old man was suspicious as to who Linley was, he still very obediently held his arms out. Staring at the pitch-black antimagic manacles, Linley chopped directly down with his adamantine heavy sword.

'Wielding Something Heavy as Though it Were Light' – Thunderbolt!

The adamantine heavy sword drifted down, as slowly and gracefully as a leaf, barely brushing against the center of the antimagic manacles. As it did, with a 'crack' sound, multiple cracks appeared in the antimagic manacles, and pieces of it even went flying to the edges of the room.

The old man only had to casually shake his hands, and the two halves of the already-destroyed manacles went flying in opposite directions.

"I didn't ask you to save me, so I owe you nothing." The emaciated, pale-faced old man stood there, staring at Linley coldly.

Linley glanced at him, but Linley's dark gold pupils seemed to stir no fear in this old man at all.

"Do you have enmity with the Radiant Church?" Linley said quietly.

Both of them were speaking extremely quietly, and Lampson's group in the two story building couldn't hear their conversation at all.

"Enmity? I won't stop until one of us is destroyed." The old man said boldly.

"That's all I need." Linley said calmly. "Although I don't know who you are, I must tell you...tonight, none of the Radiant Church's men can be allowed to leave here alive. I don't want to reveal myself to them."

"Reveal yourself?" The old man was curious. "Which plane of existence do you come from, Draconian? Could it be that you are a Draconian from one of the Four Higher Planes? The Infernal Realm?"

Linley glanced at him. “No.”

The old man began to laugh evilly. “Then let me tell you who I am, first. My name is Zassler [Sai’si’le]. I am an Arch Magus, a necromancer of the ninth rank. Yourself?”

Linley was truly shocked.

As a magus, Linley knew very well that there were three types of magic which surpassed earth, fire, wind, water, lightning, light, and darkness style magic. Doehring Cowart had discussed this with him before as well.

These three forms of magic were the Oracular Magic which the Radiant Church was adept at, the Life Magic which was used by the legendary High Priest of the Yulan Empire, and the extremely rare Necromantic Magic.

All three of these types of magic were extremely rare in the Yulan continent.

When Linley realized that Holmer was ambushing him, because Holmer had used poison gas, Linley had asked him if he was a necromancer. If he had been...Linley probably wouldn’t have been able to bear killing him.

After all!

The Four Higher Planes had been created by the Four Overgods. These Overgods were, respectively, the Overgod of Fate, the Overgod of Life, the Overgod of Death, and the Overgod of Destruction.

The Overgod of Fate had passed down Oracular Magic.

The Overgod of Life had passed down Life Magic.

The Overgod of Death had passed down Necromantic Magic.

These three branches of magic were astonishingly powerful, precisely because they originally stemmed from the Four Overgods. As for the Overgod of Destruction, he hadn’t passed down any magic at all. The followers of the Overgod of Destruction held their own power and abilities in prime reverence.

For example, the War God O’Brien was a follower of the Overgod of Destruction.

“An Arch Magus necromancer?” Shock appeared on Linley’s face.

“And you?” The Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, stared at Linley.

“Why should I tell you about myself? I didn’t ask you to tell me about yourself.” Linley said calmly. The Arch Magus necromancer was instantly stunned, not knowing what to say.

Right at this time, the black-robed man came back from the restroom.

“Bro, where the hell did you go?” Seeing that there was no one outside, the black robed man’s face immediately changed, as he shouted loudly in anger.

Their task of watching over this Arch Magus necromancer was an extremely critical one. How could he not be furious when he saw that his brother had just disappeared without a word?

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 25, When Experts Join Forces

This loud shout by the black-robed man not only frightened Linley and the Arch Magus necromancer, it also startled Lampson and the other three experts of the ninth rank on the second floor.

“What’s going on? Why is Xartes gone?” Lampson immediately pushed open his door, walking to the second floor corridor and barking angrily.

At this time, the other three combatants of the ninth rank came out of their rooms as well.

Within Zassler’s room.

Hearing the loud shouts, the look on Zassler’s face changed. He immediately instructed the nearby Linley, “You killed one combatant of the ninth rank, but there are five remaining. I will take care of three of them. You handle the other two. Don’t tell me you aren’t able to do so.”

Zassler was quite confident in his ability to deal with three combatants of the ninth rank.

“You only need to kill one.” Linley said calmly. At the same time, Linley quietly awaited the opponents to gather outside. When they did so, Bebe and Haeru would ambush them from behind, while he and the Arch Magus necromancer would attack from the front. This pincer attack would make it even harder for their opponents to flee.

Hearing Linley’s words, Zassler couldn’t help but sneer, “You really dare to make all sorts of wild boasts.”

“Bro!” At this moment, the black-robed man saw the corpse of Xartes. He immediately let out a howl of grief, while also noticing that there were now two men inside the room.

Like a gust of wind, the four other combatants of the ninth rank descended from the higher floors.

Lampson and the others stared at Zassler, then at Linley. The expressions on their face changed.

“Hello, everyone. Last time we fought, it wasn’t as fun as it should have been. Let’s play again.” The Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, beamed happily at the five combatants of the ninth rank in front of him.

“The antimagic shackles are broken.” A silver-haired old expert of the ninth rank said in shock.

But Lampson was staring at Linley.

“Cardinal Lampson. Long time no see.” Linley held his adamantine heavy sword in his hands, his dark gold eyes shooting a cold, merciless glare towards these men.

Almost all of the high level combatants of the Radiant Church knew about the terrifying appearance Linley had when transformed.

“Linley!”

Lampson’s voice was very low, and his facial expression was dark.

“You are the Linley who killed six of my comrades?” Xartes’ younger brother, that black-robed man, stared at Linley in disbelief. “How is that possible?”

The Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, also stared at Linley in surprise. From the reaction of the Radiant Church’s squad, this ‘Draconian’ who had rescued him apparently was quite formidable. “Oh, your name is Linley? And it seems you are even more famous than me?”

Linley just stared coldly at the enemies. “Enough talk. Let’s do this.”

“My men are ready. We can move at any time.” The Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, laughed delightedly. Suddenly, two golden skeletal archers manifested behind him.

Linley was startled.

He had heard that Necromantic Magic possessed the Wraith Call ability, but this was the first time he had seen it in action. These two golden skeletal archers had auras that weren’t the slightest bit weaker than combatants of the ninth rank.

“Linley, you seem to be quite powerful. Let’s have a little competition and see who kills more.” Zassler laughed delightedly, while at this moment, three powerful, three-meter tall golden-furred zombies appeared at the door. These golden-furred zombies had jade-green eyes.

Two golden skeletal archers, and three golden-furred zombies. Each of them had the power of a combatant of the ninth rank.

Combined, they made up a force of five combatants of the ninth rank!

Lampson looked at Zassler, then looked at Linley. Grinding his teeth, he ordered in a low voice, “Retreat. We leave now!” Lampson truly did not wish to give this order.

In order to capture Zassler, they had sacrificed so much.

But once they learned the secrets of Necromantic Magic from Zassler, the Radiant Church would totally be capable of secretly raising an entire squad of necromancers.

“Bebe. Haeru. Now!” Linley mentally ordered.

“Kill.”

The Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, issued a callous order, while at the same time he began to continue mumbling the words to yet another magical spell. Although these skeletal archers and golden-furred zombies had the power of ninth rank combatants, they were only equivalent to early-stage ninth rank combatants.

He, Zassler, had two summons which he was extremely proud of.

In order to subdue these two creatures he had encountered in the plane of departed souls, he had expended a tremendous amount of effort. Zassler’s lips were constantly moving as he mumbled the words to this spell. The difficulty of summoning these two departed souls was far greater than the first five.

“Flee, now! The Undead Dragon is about to arrive!” The two Special Executors, the two Ascetics, and the Cardinal all hurriedly fled from the courtyard.

But right at this moment...

“Swish!” “Swish!”

Two golden arrows split the air, piercing directly towards the two Ascetics. At the same moment, two black blurs suddenly appeared from outside the courtyard.

“Lampson. Not one of you will escape.” Linley’s callous voice rang out, while at the same time, Linley charged towards them like a bolt of lightning.

Linley’s movement speed really was incredibly fast. As a peak-stage ninth rank combatant who had inherited the speed inherent to the Armored Razorback Wurm, was supported by the Supersonic spell, and also borrowed the ‘imposing force’ of the world...Linley’s speed far surpassed those two Special Executors, to say nothing of the Ascetics and the Cardinal.

“Roaaaar!”

The Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, charged recklessly at one of the Special Executors, clawing and biting at him. Terrified, the Special Executor immediately chopped viciously at the Blackcloud Panther with his sword.

“Ah!” The Special Executor’s skull was caved in by the panther’s paw, while his sword hadn’t managed to injure Haeru in the slightest.

“Hrmph.” The Blackcloud Panther was filled with contempt.

In the past, Linley had used the adamantine heavy sword while at the peak-stage of the ninth rank in Dragonform, yet still hadn’t been able to do anything. In the end, he had been forced to rely on both the Supergravity Field as well as the Airwings spells before he could force the panther to submit.

In terms of defense, the Blackcloud Panther was even more formidable than Linley, and only a whisker inferior to Bebe.

“Slash, slash!”

Catching the Special Executor totally off-guard, Bebe pierced straight through his defense, driving his claws into the man’s chest and ripping the man’s heart out.

In the blink of an eye, the two magical beasts had killed two combatants of the ninth rank.

“Groooooowl!” The Blackcloud Panther turned and attacked the nearby Ascetic. The Ascetic was truly stunned. Two magical beasts had just popped up out of nowhere and killed two Special Executors.

Bebe charged towards the other Ascetic as well.

The two Ascetics and Lampson were all truly in states of shock. They specialized in light-style magic, but all magic took time to set up. The spells they could instacast wouldn’t be of use against these two magical beasts.

“Lampson!”

Linley let out a loud roar. Wielding his adamantine heavy sword, like a demonic god, he chopped down with his black adamantine heavy sword, causing the very air to vibrate with the force of the blow.

Lampson discovered, to his terror, that the space above him had been totally locked in.

“Lin-”

In the moment of his death, Lampson thought back to that first time he had encountered Linley. That was the day that the sculpture, ‘Awakening From the Dream’ was being auctioned. At that time, Linley was an optimistic, joyful young genius. But a few years later, Linley had become so frightening. And today, Linley was going to take his life.

“Bam.”

Before Lampson’s unwilling eyes, Linley’s adamantite heavy sword slashed down directly on his body. At this moment, Linley managed to link together some of the scattered insights he had regarding the new level he was trying to attain.

It was like the pulse of the world itself.

Those deep tremors. Those irresistible vibrations. The terrifying force that the adamantite heavy sword was carrying suddenly transformed into a ‘pulse’ like rhythm which entered Lampson’s body.

Lampson’s entire body trembled once, and then he collapsed to the ground. Not a single wound could be seen on Lampson’s body...but blood was flowing from Lampson’s ear and nose.

If someone were to cut open Lampson’s skin, they would discover that Lampson’s internal organs had all disintegrated.

At this time, Bebe and Haeru finished off the two remaining Ascetics. This killing spree was simply too perfectly formulated. The undead creatures which Zassler had summoned, along with Linley’s fearsome appearance, had actually frightened Lampson’s group so much that they had directly fled, but just as they had reached the walls, they were caught totally off-guard by Bebe and Haeru, these two unspeakably terrifying magical beasts.

The end result was plain for everyone to see.

Bebe, Haeru, and Linley had killed five combatants of the ninth rank! If they counted the person whom Linley had killed at the beginning, they had killed six.

“Groooowl.”

Right at this moment, in the middle of the courtyard, the space began to rumble as a dimensional crack appeared. An enormous, black dragon’s head stretched out through the dimensional crack.

Wraith Call – Undead Dragon!

“But...but...” Zassler stared at Linley, as well as his black Shadowmouse and the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru. He was totally shocked, totally speechless.

Just now, he had been very arrogant, going so far as to say that he would deal with three of them, if Linley could handle two.

But before his undead creatures had killed a single person, Linley and his magical beasts had killed all of the combatants.

“Mr. Zassler, there’s no need to finish summoning this Undead Dragon, I think. Or did you want to test it out against Bebe, or perhaps Haeru?” Linley said calmly.

The leathery face of the Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, twitched. And then, he banished the Undead Dragon back to the plane of departed souls.

“Linley, those two magical beasts of yours are indeed rather powerful. But my Undead Dragon isn’t weak either. What’s more, the Undead Dragon isn’t the only creature I possess. I also have an Ancient Wight.” Zassler sneered. “You must understand, so long as the realm of departed souls remains, the army available to a necromancer is endless.”

Linley truly was frightened by Zassler’s words.

Actually, in his heart, Zassler knew that taming an undead creature in the realm of departed souls was no easy feat. They had to be subdued one at a time, after all. In the past, when he had subdued this Undead Dragon, he had sacrificed many other undead creatures.

“Let’s hurry up and clean up this courtyard. Don’t let the Radiant Church know what happened here.” Linley said immediately.

Zassler immediately began to issue orders to his undead creatures.

Those two golden skeletal archers and the three golden-furred zombies very obediently began to dispose of the corpses. They were quite efficient. Very soon, all the corpses had vanished.

“Linley.” Zassler looked at Linley with interest. “From what Lampson said, it seems you are quite famous. Tell me about yourself?”

Linley glanced at Zassler. “Shut your mouth. Quiet.”

Seeing Linley’s absolutely emotionless golden eyes, Zassler began to laugh. “Linley, it seems as though you have quite a large grudge against the Radiant Church, am I right?”

“So what if I do?” Linley responded this time.

“What sort of grudge?” Zassler immediately asked.

“I won’t stop till one of us is destroyed.” Linley’s voice was quiet, but it was like the sinister wind which blew in the realm of departed souls, capable of making one’s soul shudder.

Zassler’s eyes immediately lit up. He excitedly said, “Haha, good. Linley, it seems you have some ability. How about this. You assist me, and together, we will deal with the Radiant Church.”

“Me, assist you? You be the leader?” Linley looked at Zassler.

Zassler had to admit to himself that he felt just the slightest bit uncomfortable when Linley stared at him with those dark golden eyes.

“No need to differentiate between who is the lead, and who is not. The two of us will work together.” As a necromancer, Zassler’s close-combat abilities were very poor. In addition, his undead creatures took a certain amount of time to summon.

Linley’s dark gold eyes stared at Zassler for quite some time.

“Fine. I accept.” Linley finally spoke. Linley had to admit that joining forces with a necromancer could indeed make him stronger.

Zassler immediately exulted. “Haha, wonderful. With the two of us joining forces, what have we to fear? Heidens, there will come a day when I kill you, you old bastard. Linley, who in the Radiant Church do you wish to kill?” Zassler was certain that Linley had to have had a major grudge against someone in the Radiant Church, for him to hate it so.

“Who?”

Linley shook his head. “I intend to destroy the Radiant Church and tear out its roots.”

“The Radiant Church?” Zassler was truly stunned for a moment, then he laughed loudly. “Haha, wonderful, excellent! When the time comes, we will kill Heidens together and annihilate the Radiant Church!”

But Linley’s face was cold and emotionless.

“Let’s go.” Linley led Bebe and Haeru towards the exit.

“Where to?” Zassler immediately followed.

“Do you have any destination?” Linley asked.

“None.” Zassler shook his head.

Linley said calmly, “Then starting today, just follow me.” As he spoke, Linley led Bebe and Haeru into the darkness. Zassler started, then mumbled to himself, “It seems that by following this Linley, the future will be quite exciting.” And thus, this eight hundred year old Arch Magus necromancer followed Linley into the night.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 26, Mutual Trust

There were no stars in the night sky, nor was there a moon.

Linley and the Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, and Bebe made their way through the secluded alleyway. At this time, Linley returned to his human form.

“Crackle—”

Linley’s ripped and torn pants were instantly consumed by flame. And then, with a flip of the hand, Linley retrieved yet another pair of pants as well as a form-fitting black shirt. In the blink of an eye, Linley redressed himself.

“Oh, this Linley kid is even more special than I thought.” Zassler’s green eyes stared at Linley. How could Zassler not know what had just happened? Linley clearly had an interspatial ring.

He, Zassler, had an interspatial ring of his own as well.

Over four hundred years ago, in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, when he was collecting undead slaves, he had accidentally raised a half-shattered skeleton that had been dead for who knows how many years. On the skeleton’s finger, there was an interspatial ring.

At the time, Zassler had been wildly overjoyed.

Based on his observations of the surroundings, Zassler guessed that this skeleton most likely had engaged in battle against magical beasts countless thousands of years ago, and then crawled into a deep valley where it had died of its heavy injuries. But after thousands of years, the local geography had changed and the valley had been sealed off.

As an 800+ year old Arch Magus necromancer, it was understandable for him to be in possession of an interspatial ring. But this young man in front of him clearly was very young. Where did he acquire one?

“Let’s move, fast.” Linley finished dressing himself and let out a quiet order.

“Linley, I find myself more and more curious about you.” Zassler’s laugh was so very sinister.

Linley glanced at him sideways. “Zassler, remember. In the future, without my permission, you are not to call me by my real name. Just call me ‘Ley.’”

Zassler’s eyebrows twitched. “I understand. You are afraid your identity will be revealed.”

Actually, Linley’s name was a relatively famous one in the O’Brien Empire as well. But this was primarily in the field of sculpture. Sculpture aficionados knew a great deal about Linley. A sixteen year old who was able to carve a sculpture on the level of the Ten Masterpieces? How could they not be filled with admiration towards him?

Unfortunately, Zassler, that old philistine, had no interest in sculpture.

They hurried along the way.

“Where are we going?” Zassler asked quietly while maintaining his high rate of movement.

“Outside the city.” Linley said calmly.

“But this isn’t the direction of the city gate, is it?” Zassler asked suspiciously.

“Must we leave the city by the city gate?” Linley glanced at Zassler, who immediately understood what Linley meant.

“But it isn’t ten o’clock at night yet. The city gates haven’t shut yet. We absolutely can depart by the city gates if we wish.” Zassler objected.

“I’m not certain of the forces which the Radiant Church has in the prefectural city of Cerre. Perhaps they have people planted amongst the gate guards here. If you go by that route...it’s possible that they will recognize you. After all, aside from those six experts from the headquarters of the Radiant Church, there are others who have seen you today and knew that you were heading towards that residence.” Linley said calmly.

Zassler nodded.

On the way to being locked into the residence, there had indeed been another group of people within the residence, all of whom clearly were the Radiant Church’s people in the prefectural city of Cerre. Originally, there were servants there to serve Lampson and the others as well.

But Lampson was extremely careful. He was afraid of the possibility that these people had been infiltrated, and thus all of the servants had been sent away.

....

Linley and Zassler quickly arrived at the high city walls. Those twenty-meter high walls were more than enough to render Zassler speechless.

“There’s no way I can get over.” Zassler was quite blunt.

He was an Arch Magus necromancer. His physical condition was on par with an ordinary fighter of the third rank. But for him to leap over a twenty, thirty meter high wall was impossible.

“Haeru.” Linley looked at his Blackcloud Panther.

“Groooooowl.” This two meter tall, four meter long, handsome black panther, Haeru, stared at the Arch Magus necromancer Zassler with his cold eyes.

“Ride on Haeru’s back.” Linley instructed.

Zassler no longer hesitated, immediately leaping onto Haeru’s back. Standing on Haeru’s neck, Bebe also gave Zassler a challenging look. Zassler, however, didn’t dare contend against these two magical beasts.

He had clearly seen the results of that battle just then. Given his judgment, he could clearly tell that both the black Shadowmouse and the black panther were magical beasts of the ninth rank. Without having his undead minions ready, he, an Arch Magus necromancer, didn’t dare irritate magical beasts of the ninth rank.

“Let’s go.”

With a leap, Linley flew into the air like an arrow, vaulting over thirty meters with a single bound, easily flipping past the wall and landing on the other side.

“Swoosh.” With a mighty bound, Haeru transformed into a black blur and easily leapt past the twenty-meter high city wall.

On the wild grass outside the city.

“Whoah. This panther is quite fast.” Zassler clutched his chest, letting out a shocked breath. As he spoke, he dismounted.

“Stay on.” Linley immediately said. “Haeru, let’s go back now.”

Linley immediately executed the ‘Supersonic’ spell on himself. Linley quickly hurried towards their mountain valley home, moving as fast as the wind, but Haeru easily maintained pace with him.

Scant minutes later, Zassler and Linley arrived at the mountain valley.

“Starting today, you will live here. If you want to leave, it’s best if you change your appearance first.” Linley said calmly. Looking at his surroundings, Zassler nodded with satisfaction. “I like secluded areas. This place is very much suited for my training.”

That very night, Linley built a wooden room for Zassler as well.

Late at night, when Linley was seated on the grass, preparing to quietly train, he suddenly sensed that from Zassler’s wooden room, there was a dense, deathly aura emanating from within. No wonder Zassler liked secluded areas. In places where there were many people, Zassler wouldn’t dare train in such an open, unrestrained manner.

“Necromancer.” Thinking back to the information he had read about necromancers, Linley couldn’t help but feel some fear.

Generally speaking, the older a necromancer was, the more powerful his spiritual energy was, and the more terrifyingly powerful he was. Because, with enough time, they could amass an enormous number of undead minions.

“At the courtyard, Zassler’s undead minions were all of the ninth rank. Most likely, he also has an ocean’s worth of middle-rank undead minions as well.” Linley had heard that an Arch Magus necromancer could be considered an entire terrifying army by himself.

An Arch Magus necromancer was totally capable of summoning a massive army of hundreds of thousands of minions to do battle.

And, in wars, as long as he could kill his opponents, the necromancer would be able to create undead slaves out of their corpses, controlling the deceased warriors of his opponents. His opponent’s corpses would do his bidding and wage war against his enemies.

A necromancer’s army only grew with each battle.

But of course, the pre-requisite for that was that the necromancer have sufficient spiritual energy.

“In addition, I’ve heard it said that necromancers have more than just the Wraith Call ability or the ability to create undead slaves. I’ve heard that there are some unique, sinister necromantic spells.”

Necromancers were most famous for their plagues.

In historical records, there was indeed a case where, because of a single necromancer, a huge epidemic had occurred, costing tens of millions of people their lives. This was also the reason why, when Linley had seen Holmer using poison, Linley had wondered if Holmer was a necromancer.

.....

Dawn. The sky slowly brightened.

The Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler, retracted his spiritual energy out of the realm of departed souls and back into his body. Opening his eyes, a small smile appeared on his face. “Yesterday really was my lucky day.”

“Not only did I regain my liberty, in the realm of departed souls, I even managed to subdue a Black Knight Captain. Although it cost me one of my golden-furred zombies, the cost was worth it.” Zassler was very happy.

Although golden-furred zombies were also of the ninth rank, compared to a Black Knight Captain, they were much weaker. A Black Knight Captain was roughly on the same level of power as the Undead Dragon. It could be considered a peak-stage creature of the ninth rank.

Right now, under Zassler’s control were three undead minions of the peak-stage ninth rank – An Undead Dragon, an Ancient Wight, and a Black Knight Captain. At the same time, he also had available to him two golden-furred zombies and two golden skeletal archers.

Three peak-stage ninth rank minions, four ordinary ninth-rank minions.

This was the most powerful force available to Zassler. As for undead minions of the eighth and seventh ranks, he had far more. After all, in the realm of departed souls, a high-class undead could enslave many lower-ranked undead.

For example, those two golden skeletal archers controlled an army of five hundred thousand skeletons.

As for the Black Knight Captain, he had a number of Black Knights of the eighth rank under his command.

A necromancer, especially an 800+ year old Arch Magus necromancer, definitely could be considered a terrifying one-man army. This was no joke.

“Hrm?” As he walked out of his wooden room, Zassler’s eyes immediately widened.

Because right now, Linley was quietly standing on top of the pond, his eyes closed. His body seemed to be feather-light, and he didn’t sink down at all into the water.

“This is...” Zassler was extremely amazed.

Zassler knew very well that Linley was not a Saint-level combatant. After transforming, Linley was only a peak-stage ninth rank, while in his human form, he was most likely even weaker. But right now, Linley was standing there as though he weighed nothing at all.

“Mr. Zassler.” Linley suddenly opened his eyes, a rare smile on his face. At the same time, he walked over on the surface of the pond, as easily as though he were walking on solid land.

“We can be considered allies now. I want to know a few things about the Radiant Church.” Linley said directly.

Zassler chuckled, then nodded. "Even if you didn't ask me, I would tell you. Right. Before this, we should show some mutual trust in each other. I really don't know much about you at all."

"Linley. Full name, Linley Baruch. Twenty one years old. Beneath the Saint-rank, no one in the world is a match for me." Linley said calmly, but his words were extremely confident.

As a peak-stage Dragonblood Warrior of the ninth rank, he could already be considered invincible save against Saint-levels. When combining that with the adamantine heavy sword which he could use with the 'impose' level at maximum proficiency now, and more importantly with Linley's supportive abilities as a dual-element magus of the eighth rank...Linley's power could rise to an amazing level.

"Dragonblood Warrior. No wonder." Only now did Zassler understand that Linley wasn't a Draconian. Suddenly, Zassler stared. "What did you say? Twenty one years old?"

"And?" Linley looked at Zassler.

Linley knew very well that this Arch Magus necromancer was definitely a very proud person. If Linley wasn't able to totally overawe him, most likely their teamwork would be very difficult to manage.

"How is that possible?" Zassler was rather shocked. But then, he laughed. "Haha, I'm different. The older we necromancers are, the more of an advantage we have. This year, I'll be 866 years old." Zassler proudly announced his age.

"Linley, you say that you are invincible aside from the Saint-levels. I don't really believe it." Zassler said calmly. "My army of undead minions reaches into the millions, and I have three peak-stage undead minions of the ninth rank."

At this time, both sides were trying to forcibly suppress the other. In addition, by letting each other know exactly how powerful they were, they would be able to coordinate their teamwork better as well.

"Zassler." Linley glanced at him coldly. "I admit that if I were to fight against your entire army of undead, I wouldn't be able to fight through them. However, I have two peak-stage magical beasts of my own. And I've forgotten to tell you something. I'm not only a Dragonblood Warrior. I am also a dual-element magus of the eighth rank. Your human wave tactics are of no use against me."

Zassler was now totally stunned.

He could accept that as a Dragonblood Warrior, Linley could reach the peak of the ninth rank as a warrior at twenty one years of age.

But a twenty one year old dual element magus of the eighth rank was absolutely terrifying.

After all, the hardest part of magus training was cultivating spiritual energy. There was simply no way to avoid it. For a twenty one year old to have such a terrifying amount of spiritual energy was something which Zassler didn't even dare to think about.

"A dual-element magus of the eighth rank. Twenty one years old?" Zassler murmured. "Is this the number one magus genius in all of history?"

When Linley was seventeen, he had reached the seventh rank as a magus. This was the second youngest in history.

But a twenty one year old dual-element magus of the eighth rank? This was the first in history.

“When I reached the eighth rank as a necromancer, I believe I was around four hundred years old.” When Zassler thought about how old he had been, he found that there was nothing more he could say.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 27, Secrets of the Church

Zassler knew that for a twenty one year old to reach such a level meant that in the future, he would eventually leave Zassler far behind in the dust.

“We can be considered to know something about each other’s abilities now. Didn’t you want to know about the Radiant Church?” A look of self-confidence was on Zassler’s face. With regards to the secrets of the Radiant Church, he, Zassler, probably knew as much as the high level members of the Church itself.

“Speak.” Linley immediately began to listen carefully.

Zassler nodded. “Simply put, the Radiant Church’s power, on the most superficial level, includes Missionaries, Priests, Bishops, Vicars, and Cardinals. They also have the eight ace regiments of knights, as well as powerful Knights of the Radiant Temple. This can be considered their second military force. In addition, they also have the servants of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal as well as a large number of Ascetics.”

Hearing this, Linley was silent. He knew all this already.

“But aside from these overtly visible forces, they also have two hidden forces.” These words immediately aroused Linley’s interest.

Ascetics and Executors of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal were considered their ‘overtly visible’ forces?

“These two hidden forces are extremely formidable, more powerful than any of their other forces. The first hidden force is known as the Zealots!” Zassler frowned. “These Zealots are very terrifying. They have a very strange power which is not light-style power. I can’t explain it either.”

This was the first time that Linley had heard the term ‘Zealot’.

“And the second force?” Linley asked.

Zassler’s face was solemn. “The second force is the most powerful force the Radiant Church has to offer, their true trump card. They will never use this force unless things reach the final, most critical point. These are...Descended Angels!”

“Angels?!” Linley’s heart shook.

In the past, at the Ernst Institute, Linley had read quite a bit regarding Angels. The impression he had of Angels was that they were powerful, extremely powerful.

“Because of the restrictions of having fleshly bodies, Descended Angels will not be at the peak of their power. However, even the weakest Descended Angel will be a combatant of the ninth rank. Many are Saint-levels. Descended Angels are the true, most terrifying force available to the Radiant Church.” Zassler sighed.

Linley’s heart was filled with shock.

“Zassler, I’ve read about Angels before. The descriptions of the most powerful Angels say that they have the power of Deities. If the Radiant Church has a large number of powerful Angels, they shouldn’t be in their current state.” Linley probed.

Zassler shook his head. “No. The power of the Descended Angels will depend on the human vessels the Radiant Church provides.”

“Human vessels?” Linley looked questioningly at Zassler.

“Right. Angels are unable to create dimensional rifts and directly descend into our world. Their only option is to use some special methods and descend into the body of a human. The strength or weakness of this human body will determine how much power the Angel can wield.” Zassler explained.

“Linley, although this world has ninth-rank combatants and Saint-level combatants...if it weren’t for their battle-qi, their physical strength would be quite a bit weaker. Normal humans can only reach the sixth rank based on their muscular strength.”

Linley agreed with this assessment.

“When an Angel descends into a body with muscular strength of the sixth rank, they can at most wield power of the ninth rank. Thus, the Radiant Church needs bodies of the seventh rank, or even higher.” Zassler said with certainty.

“Even more powerful bodies?” Linley frowned.

“Although normal human bodies can generally only reach the sixth rank, there are still some geniuses who are extremely powerful. Since youth, they possess boundless strength. It can be said that they are inherently powerful. These people with special natural gifts might reach the limit of the seventh rank based on muscle power alone. And a body which can naturally reach the seventh rank in power should be enough to allow an Angel to wield power of the Saint-level.”

Hearing Zassler’s words, Linley couldn’t help but frown.

Because Linley’s great grandfather had been able to train to the seventh level just based on his muscular strength. But afterwards, Linley’s great grandfather had died in battle. In the past, Linley had never questioned this, but now...

“Could it have been possible that my great grandfather was actually taken away by the Radiant Church for his body?” Linley was guessing.

In truth, all of the Four Supreme Warriors possessed tremendous innate physical gifts. All of them could train to an extremely powerful level just based on muscle strength.

Zassler continued, “This has caused the Radiant Church to scour the entire world for people with powerful bodies. The more powerful the body, the more powerful the Descended Angel will be. But it’s of no use. In this era, the Yulan continent has four Deity-level combatants. Faced with these Deity-level combatants, Saint-level combatants can do nothing but die.”

“Four Deity-level combatants?” Linley stared at Zassler in surprise. It seemed as though Zassler knew about the existence of that expert from the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

Zassler saw Linley’s surprise. Laughing, he said, “The four Deity-level combatants are humanity’s War God and High Priest, the magical beast who is the King of the Forest of Darkness, and the magical beast King of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts who appeared on Apocalypse Day.”

“Linley, when I was being taught the secrets to Necromantic Magic, I learned...that the bodies of Deities are at the Saint-level in terms of physical strength alone.” Zassler said with certainty.

A Deity-level combatant could be said to be composed of his divine body, his divine spark, and the divine power he wielded. There was no way a Saint-level combatant could injure them at all.

“Thus, in order to wield the power of a Deity, the body alone must be at the Saint-level in physical strength. Most likely, the Radiant Church is not able to manifest a Deity-level Angel. Even if high class Angels were to descend, they wouldn’t be able to use their deific power, due to being restricted by their physical bodies.” Zassler said confidently.

The teachings of Necromantic Magic were abstruse and profound. In addition, Zassler was over eight centuries old. He truly knew many things.

“Deity-level combatants!” Linley’s heart swelled with amazement.

Any of these four most powerful experts of the Yulan continent could shake the world with their might. On the Apocalypse Day, the appearance of Dylin had caused both the Radiant Church and the Cult of Shadows to flee and avoid him.

The Radiant Church had their Descended Angels. But then, what did the Cult of Shadows possess, for them to be equal to the Radiant Church for countless, untold years?

Despite that, both powers combined still didn’t dare to offend that Dylin, the King of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

From this, one could clearly tell how ineffable the power of a Deity-level combatant was.

“Who knows when I will have power like that.” Linley was filled with eagerness and hope towards this sort of power.

....

Zassler continued to tell Linley a great deal of information regarding the Radiant Church.

“The Radiant Church cares the most about two things. The first is finding extremely powerful bodies. The second is to find extremely pure souls.” As Zassler said this, Linley’s face changed.

Pure souls?

His own mother had died as a result of this.

“Supposedly, the ‘Radiant Sovereign’ which the Radiant Church worships only needs two things. The first is the worship of his followers. The second is pure souls. The purer the souls offered by the Church, the greater the gifts that the Radiant Sovereign will bestow upon them.”

By now, Linley had a good understanding of the Radiant Church.

The reason why the Radiant Church sacrificed pure souls to the Radiant Sovereign was the same reason they searched for powerful bodies. It was because they wanted to acquire powerful Descended Angels.

“Linley, in the Yulan continent, the Radiant Church has hidden reserves of power in every location. After all, the power of a religion is extremely formidable.” Zassler said with a sigh. “But in the Four Great Empires, the Radiant Church is fairly weak. In the Anarchic Lands, however, their influence is quite powerful.”

“Anarchic Lands?”

A map drifted to the forefront of Linley’s memories.

East of the O'Brien Empire, there was an area which was slightly larger than the O'Brien Empire itself. In the center of this area was an enormous forest – the Forest of Darkness.

The Forest of Darkness was thousands of kilometers wide, and thousands of kilometers long as well. This enormous forest took up half of the land in this area.

North of the Forest of Darkness, were the Eighteen Northern Duchies, roughly the same size as one of the O'Brien Empires administrative provinces.

South of the Forest of Darkness were the 48 Anarchic Duchies. The total area of these duchies was roughly half the size of the O'Brien Empire. This could be considered the most politically chaotic area in the Yulan continent, as the 48 Anarchic Duchies engaged in constant warfare.

“The Radiant Church and the Cult of Shadows are the two most powerful religions in the Anarchic Lands.” Zassler said.

Linley could imagine.

In the war-torn Anarchic Lands, it was only natural for those poor commoners to turn to religion for solace.

“Alright, I’ve talked so much that my mouth is dry. Let’s eat breakfast.” Zassler laughed loudly.

Zassler and Linley were both in possession of interspatial rings, and both their rings contained fine wine. Drinking wine while eating freshly plucked fruit, the two of them continued to discuss their plans for dealing with the Radiant Church.

“Oh, right. I suddenly remember something.” Zassler suddenly said.

“What’s that?” Linley looked at Zassler

Zassler chuckled. “This time, when I was being escorted under guard, we ran into another squad of the Radiant Church’s men. This squad was also escorting a group of people.”

“Who? An expert like you?” Linley asked.

If they were experts, then he and Zassler would go rescue them. After all, each of them had enmity with the Radiant Church. If they banded together, they would only be stronger.

“No. It was two adorable girls.” Zassler shook his head. “Originally, when that squad and Lampson’s squad met up, I saw those girls. I must say, those two girls were as innocent and pure as angels. Based on my familiarity with souls, I am quite certain that these two girls have extremely pure souls.”

Practitioners of Necromantic Magic, compared with the other types of magi, were undoubtedly the most experienced when it came to souls.

“However, in the eyes of the Radiant Church, my importance far outweighed the importance of those two girls. Lampson and the others took me away at high speed, while the two girls were taken away by another squad, which was moving quite a bit slowly.” Zassler said.

“So your intention is...?” Linley looked questioningly at Zassler.

Zassler chuckled, “My intention is for us to go rescue those two girls. After all, that squad didn’t have many experts in it. It only had a single combatant of the eighth rank.”

In the eyes of Zassler and Linley, an expert of the eighth rank really was nothing.

“How is it that an Arch Magus necromancer like you would be so kind-hearted as to go rescue two girls?” Linley looked at Zassler.

Zassler laughed. “I delight in disrupting the affairs of the Radiant Church whenever I can. And what’s more, with such extremely pure souls, the two of them might be suitable for training in Necromantic Magic.”

The requirements for learning Necromantic Magic were terrifyingly high.

This was why in the entire Yulan continent, the number of necromancers was extremely, extremely low. The soul was a person’s most important quality, and even the Radiant Sovereign desired to acquire pure souls. From this, one could tell how important a pure soul was. In order to learn Necromantic Magic, an extremely pure soul was needed.

“You should know what trajectory they were on, right?” Linley asked.

Zassler nodded his head. “The path they took should be identical to the path that I had been taken on, unless this squad has already received word of the deaths of Lampson and his men. Only then might they suddenly change their direction.”

“Then let’s go.” Linley immediately rose.

“Groooooowl.” Bebe and Haeru, who had been lying on the nearby grass, both stood up. These two magical beasts were very excited. By their nature, magical beasts were violent and barbaric, loving to do battle.

“Right now?” Zassler was a bit startled. “We’ve destroyed all trace of Lampson and his men. Even if the Radiant Church’s people discovered that the manor was empty, they probably would only think that Lampson and his men had left. They wouldn’t discover that Lampson is dead this fast. Even if they found out that Lampson and his men were dead, they wouldn’t be able to send the message to the other squad so quickly.”

“Leave nothing to chance at all. We will immediately set out on the same path that you were taken on and trace our way back.” Linley said immediately.

Zassler, helpless against Linley, could only shake his head, let out a sigh, then rise to his feet as well.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 28, Flower-Like Sisters

Dawn. The air was clear and fresh.

Ruskin [Luo'si'jin] was leading his two subordinates as they moved at high speed in the direction of the manor where Lampson and the others had settled into last night.

“I must make sure that we take excellent care of Lord Lampson and the others. A single word from Lampson could most likely get us all promoted.” Ruskin was feeling rather frustrated though. “Unfortunately, it seemed as though Lord Lampson is being extremely cautious. They didn't allow a single attendant to enter the manor.”

As he was thinking these things, Ruskin walked to the gate.

“What's going on? The gate isn't shut?” Ruskin frowned. He knew that Lampson and the other lords were on a very important matter. They definitely wouldn't leave the door open.

He entered the courtyard. As he did, he felt that the courtyard was a bit too quiet.

“Milords.” Ruskin called out.

But his voice echoed out in the courtyard without any response.

“The two of you, look around for me. I'll go upstairs and see what I can find.” Ruskin had a very bad feeling about this. He immediately headed to the second floor, where Lampson and the others' rooms had been located.

Every single door on the second floor was open. None were closed.

Entering Lampson's room, Ruskin immediately frowned. The bed was in a used state, clearly not made. At the same time, at the head of the bed, there was a backpack.

“This isn't right.”

Ruskin immediately entered another room. Indeed, the bed there was also in a messy state, and a backpack was on a table. As of yet, Ruskin hadn't seen any problems...but he felt this wasn't quite right.

“Lord Lampson didn't even have the time to put on the backpack, and the same was true for the other lords as well. Could it be that something important occurred, forcing Lord Lampson and the others to immediately depart?” Ruskin frowned.

“Milord!” A frantic call from downstairs.

Ruskin's face changed, and he immediately rushed down the hallway, then jumped down directly from the balcony to the courtyard.

“What is it?” Ruskin looked at his two subordinates.

“Milord, there are bloodstains here.” The two of them pointed at the wall.

Originally, Zassler had ordered his undead minions to destroy all traces of the deceased. Virtually all traces, including bloodstains, had indeed been removed. But when the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, had smashed open that Special Executor's skull with one paw, blood had splattered everywhere. Although those undead minions were very industrious and careful, there were still a few tiny traces remaining.

"Bloodstains. And the lords have all disappeared?"

Staring at the quiet courtyard, Ruskin felt as though an enormous boulder was pressing against his chest. "A battle occurred here. As for the lords, could it be that they are in pursuit?"

Ruskin knew how astonishingly powerful the six of these lords were. He didn't believe that someone could kill these six lords.

Ruskin instructed his two subordinates, "The two of you, head out immediately towards the provincial capital of Basil. Report this news back."

"Yes!"

But before the two subordinates had even reached the provincial capital of Basil, Linley's group had already encountered the second squad mid-way.

"It's them?" Linley, Bebe, Zassler, and Haeru were hiding in some tall, wild grass by the roadside.

Zassler looked at the four knights surrounding a carriage. Nodding, he said, "Right. It's them. The two girls should be inside the carriage."

"Inside the carriage?"

Linley frowned, then looked at Bebe. "Bebe, I expect that the carriage will have more than just those two girls. There should be people guarding the girls as well. Bebe, you are physically small. Your assignment will be to enter the carriage at high speed and kill those guards."

Zassler nodded. "This squad should also have six people, all men. There should be two more men inside this carriage."

"Did you hear that, Bebe? Kill the two men inside the carriage." Linley laughed as he rubbed Bebe's head.

Bebe hopped onto Linley's shoulders, lifting his little head up confidently as he squeaked at Linley. "Boss. Have I, Bebe, ever let you down?"

Linley chortled lovingly.

"Let's do this." Linley said to him mentally.

Bebe immediately grew solemn as he stared at the carriage with his little eyes. And then, he quietly snuck through the tall grass, drawing closer to the carriage...

Within the carriage, there were two beautiful, jade-haired identical twin sisters. Their eyes were slightly red and swollen, and they were staring hatefully at the two men opposite of them.

"You bastards." One of the two, the one whose eyes were slightly larger, cursed in a low voice.

The two men only smiled at them, not minding in the slightest.

“Rebecca [Li’be’ka], don’t curse anymore. Cursing these pieces of garbage is a waste of energy. And to think, we believed in the Radiant Church all these years and prayed to the Lord to bring us happiness. Who would’ve thought that they would be this vile.” The other girl’s eyes were also filled with hatred.

“Big sis.” Rebecca miserably clutched at her older sister’s hand.

Rebecca and Leena [Li’na] hailed from the 48 Anarchic Duchies. They had followed their father in believing in the Radiant Sovereign, but who would’ve thought that the Radiant Church would kill their parents, then abduct them.

With their parents dead, Rebecca and Leena were now without family.

And now, their future had turned to ashes. They couldn’t see any hope.

“Father. Mother.” Rebecca and Leena began to tremble as they thought of their parents. All these years, their parents had protected them, no matter how much chaos and war there had been in the Anarchic Lands.

But this time...

“Leena. Take your little sister and run.” Their father had tightly held onto a combatant of the seventh rank at the last moment of his life. Despite only being a warrior of the fifth rank, their father had managed to drag it out for a few seconds longer.

But unfortunately, the Radiant Church’s forces were too strong.

“God, please rescue us.” Leena was shouting in her heart. “So long as you can rescue us and give us a chance to seek revenge, I am willing to sacrifice everything, including my very soul.”

She had watched as her parents died. She wanted revenge.

Unfortunately. God was too far away from them. How would he be able to sense the desires of these two ordinary souls?

“Slash.” Suddenly, a very strange sound rang out.

Leena and Rebecca both turned in surprise. They only saw a black blur flash by. “Slash!” The sound rang out a second time, and blood spurted everywhere.

Rebecca and Leena stared in shock.

The heads of the two men who had been guarding them suddenly slumped down. Half of their neck had been cut off. They were unquestionably dead.

“Who was it?” The twin sisters stared in shock, then suddenly were overjoyed. They knew that someone had rescued them. They looked in all directions, but they couldn’t see their savior.

“Squeak, squeak.” A sound rang out from beneath them.

Rebecca and Leena both lowered their heads, only to see an adorable little black mouse standing there, holding his head up in a very arrogant fashion. In a very human-like manner, it used its sharp claws to stroke its whiskers.

“A rat?” Both Rebecca and Leena were confused.

Bebe immediately grew angry, and he quickly jumped up while waving his little paws around wildly. He suddenly transformed into a black blur, flashing past them.

“It was the rat?” Rebecca and Leena began to understand.

Bebe had made no noise at all when he had killed those two. What’s more, the carriage wheels continually rumbled as the carriage rolled along the road. The four knights outside hadn’t noticed a thing.

“Ah!”

Suddenly, a miserable scream from outside.

“Roaaaar!” A furious roar from a beast.

Rebecca and Leena looked at each other, then immediately pushed open the carriage door. The carriage driver had already collapsed, his fresh blood staining the carriage.

Rebecca and Leena quickly turned to look at the four knights.

But all they saw....

Was four devilish flashes of violet light. The three knights didn’t have a chance to react before their heads went flying, while the warrior wearing black armor, Linley, landed gracefully in front of the carriage, the adamantine heavy sword on his back.

“Hello. You’ve just been freed.” Linley said with a smile.

Seeing the powerful youngster in front of them, Rebecca and Leena were both somewhat stunned. In their eyes, those knights were extremely powerful. But it seemed as though to this youngster, those knights weren’t even capable of resisting for a moment.

“Rebecca and Leena. Hello there.” An ancient voice rang out. Only now did Zassler stand up from amidst the grassy field.

Seeing Zassler’s bony, decrepit body, as well as his extremely long, white eyebrows, Rebecca and Leena both called out in excitement, “Grandpa Zassler!”

They had travelled with Zassler for a time under common guard, so they knew each other.

“Grandpa Zassler, who is this lord?” Rebecca and Leena both looked curiously towards Linley. Suddenly, the two sisters noticed an enormous black panther was drawing near them. The panther’s cold, eerie eyes made both Rebecca and Leena feel frightened.

“Don’t be afraid. Haeru, stop scaring them.” Linley barked.

“Arooo.” Haeru made a placating voice towards Linley, then lowered his head and moved to the side, no longer daring to go frighten these twin sisters.

“Rebecca, Leena, this is Lord Linley. He isn’t any weaker than me.” Zassler chortled.

“Truly?” Rebecca and Leena stared at Linley in shock.

It wasn’t that they didn’t believe Linley was powerful; it was that they had seen how, when Zassler was being escorted, how much the Radiant Church had valued him. His jailors had even a Cardinal in their midst. Zassler had bragged to these sisters before about how he was capable of destroying a million-man army. It

was only because he was surrounded and attacked by over ten combatants of the ninth rank that he was finally captured.

“Grandpa Zassler. It was this adorable mouse who saved us.” Rebecca and Leena immediately turned their heads to look at Bebe.

Bebe was currently standing on top of the carriage. He smirked at her, and then in the blink of an eye, he scurried onto Linley’s shoulders.

“You’re talking about Bebe? This is a magical beast which Linley tamed.” Zassler laughed as he introduced Bebe. Then he looked at Linley. “Linley. Let me introduce you. The younger sister, Rebecca, has slightly larger eyes. This one is the older sister, Leena.”

Linley smiled and nodded.

“Zassler, should we send these two girls back, or...?”

In Linley’s opinion, these two girls were of no use to them. After all, no matter how pure their souls were, that didn’t mean they were very powerful.

“Grandpa Zassler, we have no place to go.” The older sister, Leena, immediately grew frantic. Begging, she said, “Grandpa Zassler, let us come with you. We know that you’ve killed the Radiant Church’s people. We also want to seek revenge for our parents.”

“Grandpa Zassler, we’re begging you.” Rebecca also beseeched him.

Zassler was planning to take these girls with him all along, with the intention of possibly inducting the twins into the dark art of Necromantic Magic. But he had to get Linley’s concurrence as well.

“Linley, let’s just take them along with us. Leena and Rebecca can both cook. We can’t always just eat roast meat in the valley, can we?” Zassler laughed.

Hearing his words, Rebecca and Leena hurriedly said, “We can do anything. We can fry, cook, clean.”

The two of them knew that without anyone to rely on, two beautiful girls such as them would have a disastrous fate. Seeing how highly Zassler seemed to value Linley’s opinion, they knew that Linley was undoubtedly an expert as well. This would give them an even greater chance of getting revenge.

Linley glanced at the two siblings. Facing their beseeching gaze, he nodded. “Fine.”

Rebecca and Leena’s eyes were instantly filled with a radiant, joyful light.

“Let’s go. We’re going back.” Linley instructed.

Linley’s group once more returned to the mountain valley, but this time with the addition of these two siblings. The four of them shared one point in common: They were filled with hatred towards the Radiant Church!

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 29, Investigation

The Northwest Administrative Province, one of the seven major provinces of the O'Brien Empire, was a vast place, with tens of millions of citizens living in it. The Northwest Administrative Province's provincial capital, Basil, was the most developed of the province's cities. Within the walls of Basil alone were over a million people.

Within Basil, there were many ancient clans as well.

Count Perry [Pi'li] was a relatively unassuming noble within Basil City. But amongst the ancient clans, he had quite a bit of influence. In addition, he was an extremely amiable person who never fought with others or struggled for influence. Virtually all of the nobles of the city were on good terms with him.

"Milord Count, you've returned." The guard outside the gate to his mansion smiled and bowed.

Count Perry was two hundred years old, and all his hair had turned silvery-white. But his long beard was as resplendent as it had been when he was young. Count Perry nodded slightly towards the guard, laughing warmly, "Oh, you've gotten a haircut. This haircut suits you. Did you get it done at old Locke's [Luo'ke] place?"

Hearing the words of praise, the guard was immediately all smiles. "Right. Mr. Locke is really quite skilled."

Beaming, Count Perry entered his mansion.

"Count Perry really is a nice man." The guard sighed to himself.

Count Perry really was a very kind person. This was the opinion of virtually everyone in the city of Basil. Count Perry didn't like to kill people and didn't like foul language. His every action totally demonstrated the ethics and nobility of a noble gentleman.

He entered the inner courtyard.

Count Perry's face suddenly sank.

"What is going on? How could something like this happen multiple times?" Count Perry was very frustrated. Just a few days ago, he had received the news that Cardinal Lampson and his Ascetics and Special Executors had disappeared within the prefectural city of Cerre. And now, he had received the news that the squad that had been escorting those two girls had been killed, and the girls had vanished.

Count Perry, after becoming the person responsible for the affairs of the Radiant Church in the Northwest Administrative Province of the O'Brien Empire, hadn't encountered such a thorny problem in a long time.

"I hope Lord Lampson hasn't met with any trouble."

Perry prayed silently.

If those two girls had been saved, then they had been saved. It wasn't of major concern. But Lampson and the other five were all experts of the ninth rank, and the person they were escorting was an Arch Magus

necromancer of the ninth rank. This affair was the most important affair he had ever encountered after taking on the responsibilities for the Northwest Administrative Province.

“Milord Count.” A hawk-nosed, tall and skinny man with curly hair walked in. Bowing respectfully, he said, “We’ve already completed our investigations regarding the missing lords.”

Perry immediately looked at him. “Speak, fast.”

“Based on our sympathizers’ reports in the province, the lords still have yet to appear in any other cities. In addition, we’ve activated our entire network of sympathizers within the prefectural city of Cerre, yet we still haven’t found anyone who saw the lords leaving the city.” The hawk-nosed man replied respectfully.

Perry stared.

“What?” Perry’s heart, previously tense, genuinely began to quiver. “Lampson and the other lords couldn’t possibly have remained in the prefectural city of Cerre this entire time. And if they did stay in Cerre, there would be some trace of them. Lampson and the others must have been attacked. It is entirely possible that Lampson and the others could have exited the prefectural city of Cerre late at night by leaping past the city walls.”

“But even if that was the case, Lord Lampson should still have reappeared in a different city.”

Perry was starting to become truly worried.

He had an extremely bad premonition.

“Could it be possible that Lord Lampson encountered the attack of a powerful foe and was killed?” Perry didn’t dare to believe it. After all, Lampson and the others were all extremely powerful. To kill the six of them would require their opponents to number multiple experts of the ninth level, or a Saint-level combatant.

Perry suddenly looked at the hawk-nosed man. In a cold voice, he ordered, “Go at your fastest speed to find old Pori. Tell him to bring his three Bluewind Hawks to my study.”

“Yes, milord Count.” The hawk-nosed man knew exactly how important this situation was.

Perry hurriedly walked towards his study, and wrote three letters regarding Lampson’s squad’s affairs. Each copy was given to a different Bluewind Hawk and addressed to be delivered to the ‘Sacred Isle’.

Ever since the Holy Capital, Fenlai City, had been destroyed, the Radiant Church set up their new headquarters on an island not too far away from the Yulan continent. They publicly announced this place as being the ‘Sacred Isle’.

.....

Within the secluded valley outside the prefectural city of Cerre.

Right now, there were four wooden rooms here. One was for Linley and Bebe, another was for Zassler, the third was for Rebecca and Leena, while the last one was for Haeru.

Dawn. The valley was very quiet and peaceful.

A pair of twin beauties, so lovely they seemed to be an illusion, were chatting and laughing while washing some clothes. These clothes belonged to them, Linley, and Zassler. Within the valley, they handled all the cooking and cleaning.

“Big sis. Do you think Grandpa Zassler gets tired from spending all his time in that room training?” Rebecca asked Leena quietly.

Zassler’s wooden room was totally shrouded by a black, deathly aura. That dense, black, deathly aura made Rebecca and Leena scared to even approach it.

Leena wrinkled her nose in a frown, an adorable sight. She said consideringly, “Perhaps powerful experts all have to train very hard like that. However, I still feel more comfortable watching big brother Linley train.” As she spoke, she turned to look at the distant blue pond, and Rebecca turned to look as well.

In the center of the pond, Linley was standing on the water, not sinking at all.

“Ripple, ripple.”

The water beneath Linley’s feet were a few centimeters lower than the water around him, because Linley was constantly releasing battle-qi from his feet, creating small waves in the middle of the pond.

Linley was wielding the adamantine heavy sword in his right hand. Occasionally, he would chop with it, while other times, he would just thrust. Every movement would cause the nearby air to tremble. It was as though the air was made of mud, and when the adamantine heavy sword chopped through it, there was a sense that it was breaking through space itself.

“This ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ technique sometimes works, but sometimes doesn’t work.”

Linley’s forehead was furrowed.

When he had killed Lampson, although Linley had slashed Lampson with his sword, the outside of Lampson’s body hadn’t been injured on the slightest. His internal organs, however, had all been disintegrated.

As Linley viewed it, the third level of using the adamantine heavy sword was the ‘impose’ level. But the fourth level, was the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’.

Through using this heavy weapon, the adamantine heavy sword, Linley was now capable of unleashing the portion of the Laws of the Earth he had come to understand. This sort of attack could, in the blink of an eye, transform all the attacking power into vibrations which would enter the opponent’s body.

This sort of vibrational attack, when fully mastered, could all but ignore an opponent’s defense.

After all, the throbbing pulse of the world was something which had existed since the heavens and the earth had been formed. The secrets it contained within it were extremely deep and profound.

The principles of the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ was this:

Totally convert one’s attacking power into the same sort of vibrations as the throbbing pulse of the world itself. When these vibrations entered the opponent’s body, the opponent’s internals would also begin to resonate. The resonance would be very powerful; after all, it had been created through Linley’s attack power.

The body’s internal organs weren’t nearly as durable as a person’s external defenses.

This sort of resonance could easily annihilate the opponent’s internal organs, shaking them into tiny pieces.

“However, it is incredibly difficult to transform attack power into resonating vibrations.” Linley understood that the battle-qi and strength he normally used was a totally different sort of attack, compared to this sort of ‘resonance wave’ attack.

Only by relying on his partial understanding of the Laws of the Earth was Linley able to convert his normal attacks into this sort of ‘resonance wave’ attack.

Per Linley’s line of thought, the more ‘resonance waves’ were created, the more successful the power transformation had been.

“Sometimes, I can create over ten tremors in the blink of an eye, but other times, I can’t even create one.” Linley’s head hurt.

Linley understood that once his skill in using the heavy sword had reached this sort of level, he could already be considered as having entered the realm of using the ‘Laws of the Earth’.

But Linley wasn’t totally able to grasp it.

“I can’t be too greedy. Right now, I shouldn’t focus too much on creating as many vibrations as possible. I should focus on just one resonance wave at a time.” Wielding the adamantine heavy sword in one hand, Linley’s face was very solemn.

Suddenly....

The adamantine heavy sword seemed to tear the air apart as it chopped down against the lake.

The strange thing was, not a single ripple was created on the surface of the lake. But suddenly, the entire lake began to emit a strange gurgling sound...and then, as though it had been lifted by a giant, the entire surface of the lake suddenly rose up, forming a one-meter high wall of water.

“I succeeded again this time.”

Linley actually wasn’t too excited. He sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed when training with this ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’. He wasn’t able to reproduce the results with any regularity.

“Big brother Linley, time to eat.” Leena stood at the not-too-distant shore, laughing as she called out to him.

“Grandpa Zassler, time to eat! Stop training!” Rebecca began calling out from outside of Zassler’s wooden room.

With a flip of his hand, Linley sent the adamantine heavy sword flying into the air. When it landed, it landed neatly into its sheath. Linley had already totally mastered the ‘impose’ level, and the weight of the adamantine heavy sword didn’t impede Linley in the slightest.

On the grass, a rectangular table had been laid out.

Linley, Zassler, Rebecca, and Leena were seated around the table.

“Linley, what are you training on? I saw that bizarre training method you were working on. I’ve never seen a warrior train in such a manner.” Zassler said with curiosity.

Zassler had an extremely broad array of knowledge, but comparatively speaking, he didn’t know much about warrior training methods.

In truth, the most important thing for peak-stage experts of the ninth rank to enter the Saint-level was to advance to a higher level of understanding. And for Saint-levels to advance to the Deity-level, they also needed to understand the various Laws of heaven and earth before they could attain a divine spark.

“I am training to gain a greater understanding. It is similar to a magus’ attempts to gain insights in the nature of the elemental essences.” Linley said casually.

Zassler immediately understood.

As an Arch Magus necromancer of the ninth rank, Zassler would often envelop himself with the boundless deathly aura from the realm of departed souls to try and understand the elusive and illusory Laws of Death.

“Zassler, we killed Lampson and their men. Do you think the Radiant Church will be able to swallow their rage?” Linley was still concerned about this affair.

Zassler laughed very confidently. “Don’t worry. Let me tell you, the O’Brien Empire and the Radiant Church are very far apart. Even if they used flying magical beasts to send messages, they would need ten days or half a month. And if they were to send experts over, it would still take quite a while.”

“But if Saint-level experts were to fly here, they would be able to travel extremely fast.” Linley said solemnly.

After having killed so many of the Radiant Church’s men, it was very possible that the Radiant Church would send over Saint-level experts.

“Haha, don’t worry. They don’t dare send any Saint-level experts. Think about it. Why didn’t they send Saint-level experts to capture me, and instead send combatants of the ninth rank?” Zassler laughed loudly in delight.

Linley was curious about this as well.

If Saint-level experts had been sent after Zassler, capturing him would be very easy.

“Linley, you must understand, the O’Brien Empire is overseen by the War God. Long ago, the War God decreed that the Saint-level combatants of other nations would not be permitted to act wildly within the boundaries of the O’Brien Empire. If they came for the purpose of pleasure, that was fine, but if they were discovered engaging in acts of violence, the repercussions would be very severe.”

Zassler laughed coldly. “Even if the Radiant Church had ten times the courage, they wouldn’t dare go against the War God’s edict.”

The prestige of the War God could not be violated.

“Not necessarily.”

Linley shook his head. “Didn’t you just say it? ‘If they were discovered engaging in acts of violence.’ But what if they weren’t discovered? Remember, the prefectural city of Cerre doesn’t have any experts, and the War God is far away, in the imperial capital. If a Saint-level combatant suddenly appears in the prefectural city of Cerre, he wouldn’t necessarily know.”

Zassler was startled.

“The Radiant Church wouldn’t be that insane, right?” Zassler was a bit uncertain.

“Hard to say. After all, we killed six of the combatants of the ninth rank in one breath, this time. And when they were trying to capture you, you killed several of them as well. The Radiant Church won’t easily take this lying down, without a fight.” Linley said solemnly.

Zassler considered this for a while, then laughed. “It’s fine. Although the prefectural city of Cerre doesn’t have any Saint-level combatants, Basil City does have one. McKenzie. If Saint-level experts of the Radiant Church are sent here to fight with us, McKenzie would definitely notice it. McKenzie definitely wouldn’t permit the forces of the Radiant Church to act in such an unbridled manner on his turf. By then, with two Saint-level experts engaged in battle here, the War God would definitely find out.”

“True.” Linley began to laugh as well.

If he was able to incite the Radiant Church into a battle against the O’Brien Empire, the Radiant Church would truly have bitten off more than it could chew.

“Linley, when I was under armed escort by Lampson and the others in the Northwest Administrative Province, the people whom the Radiant Church secretly placed within the Northwest Administrative Province went to go welcome them. I remember one of them was an old man named ‘Perry’, who was responsible for their affairs in the province. Judging from their conversation, that Perry should belong to the provincial capital of Basil.

Zassler laughed sinisterly. “Since we’re going to go to Basil anyways, we might as well dispose of that Perry fellow. Perhaps we might even discover some more secrets of the Radiant Church.”

“The manager for their affairs in the Northwest Administrative Province?” Linley’s eyes lit up. “Alright. We’ll head out tomorrow.”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 30, The Five Year Agreement

Keane, the governor of the prefectural city of Cerre, was just a fourteen year old child. Although he had his older sister Jenne helping him, in truth, how much did Jenne know herself? Most of the time, it was still up to their old servant, Lambert, to help out.

Lambert's clothes were very sharp and creased. His combed hair was gleaming as he slowly strolled about in the interior of the castle, appearing every inch the noble.

“Why must the young miss always be thinking about Lord Ley?” Lambert was sighing to himself. Jenne wanted to go visit Linley, but after Linley had told her that he didn't like being disturbed in the middle of his training, Jenne had no choice but to stay in the castle. Unfortunately, it had been a long time since Linley had come to the castle.

As he watched Jenne slowly grow thinner, Lambert felt very heartsick.

“Lambert.”

Hearing his name called, Lambert turned around and saw Linley walking in by himself, dressed in a light blue warrior's outfit. Jenne and Keane had issued orders early on that if the castle guards were to see Linley, they were to let him in immediately without need for any notification.

“Lord Ley!” Lambert was extremely happy.

“Lord Ley, wait in the main hall for just a moment. I will immediately go inform the young master and the young miss.”

Within the main hall.

Linley was quietly sitting on a chair. This trip to the provincial capital of Basil he was going to make with Zassler, Leena, and her sister was most likely one where they would end up staying in the area around Basil.

After all, Linley had to be wary of the Radiant Church secretly sending Saint-level experts over. As the city of Basil had McKenzie, the Radiant Church wouldn't dare to act too wildly.

“Big brother Ley.”

A surprised and happy voice rang out from the doorway. Linley turned his head and saw Jenne, her face flushed, rush in wearing a faint red dress. Her chest was rising and falling, and she was panting. As soon as she heard the news that Linley was back, Jenne had immediately ran over as fast as she could.

“Why'd you run so fast? Look at how out of breath you are. Have a seat.” Linley laughed.

“Okay.” Jenne very obediently sat down.

After a while, Keane and Lambert entered as well. Laughing, Keane complained, “Sis, you ran too fast. I couldn't even keep up with you.”

Jenne was a bit embarrassed. She shot a vicious glare at Keane.

“Big brother Ley, it’s been a long time since you last came. How long do you plan to stay this time?” Keane said to Linley.

Linley shook his head. “This time, I’ve come to bid you farewell. I plan to leave the prefectural city of Cerre.”

“What?”

Keane and Lambert were both startled. Simultaneously, they turned their heads to look at Jenne. Where before, her face had been flushed with excitement and shyness, a stunned look was now on Jenne’s face.

“Big brother Ley, where are you going?” Jenne was the first to ask.

“For now, I plan to go to the provincial capital of Basil.” Linley replied.

The provincial capital of Basil and the prefectural city of Cerre were fairly far apart. Normal people would need to spend two or three days by carriage to get there.

“Big brother Ley, I’ll go with you.” Jenne summoned her courage and said.

Linley sighed to himself. How could he not know what Jenne was thinking? But towards Jenne, Linley felt nothing more than the love he would feel towards a younger sister. This was a familial, platonic love.

“Enough, Jenne. I’m going on business. I might encounter danger. There’s no need for you to follow me.” Linley refused.

Jenne shook her head resolutely. “I’m not afraid.”

Looking at Jenne, Linley knew that if he didn’t refuse her very openly and firmly, she wouldn’t give up. Linley let out a long sigh. “Jenne, all I care about is training. Nothing else. Jenne, there’s no way I can take care of you.”

Linley spoke with tact, but how could Jenne not understand his meaning?

Jenne’s face was somewhat pale. Since she had been eight years old, she had lived in that countryside village. The life she had lived there was both peaceful as well as harsh. On this trip to the prefectural city of Cerre, Linley had protected them the entire time, which was the only reason her and her brother had survived the trip and took over the governorship.

“Big brother Ley, I don’t want to continue repressing my feelings. Big brother Ley, I know you don’t like me that way. I don’t want to ask too much. All I want to do is ask that you allow me to accompany you. Big brother Ley, I’m willing to be your maidservant. As long as I can be by your side, I’ll be happy.” Jenne said hopefully.

Keane and Lambert were both silent.

Linley felt extremely anxious as well. Jenne really was an extremely kind girl, but...

“Jenne, there’s no need for you to follow me and expose yourself to danger. Right now, you are a noble lady. In the prefectural city of Cerre, there are definitely many outstanding young men who are pursuing you.” Linley said.

Jenne bit her lips, then resolutely shook her head. Her eyes were growing moist.

“Big brother Ley.” Keane said. “Please agree to my sister’s request. These past days when you haven’t been around, she’s had almost no appetite. She’s grown thinner now.”

Her eyes moist, Jenne looked at Linley with an appeal in her eyes.

“Jenne...”

In the end, Linley’s heart softened. “Five years. I will give you five years, and you give me five years as well. Five years from now, I’ll come meet you. If at that time you are still resolute in your decision, I’ll agree to let you accompany me.”

Time was the best medicine.

Five years from now, Jenne would have matured and her thoughts and beliefs would have changed as well. Linley believed that perhaps because Jenne didn’t have parents to take care of her when she was young, she had come to depend on and love him. In a few more years, when Jenne grew more mature, her mind would change. By then, Linley wouldn’t be under any pressure.

“Five years. Okay.” Hope appeared once more in Jenne’s eyes.

“Jenne.”

Linley looked at Jenne. “Before I go, I need to tell you something. My real name isn’t ‘Ley’. It is Linley Baruch.”

“Linley Baruch?” Jenne murmured.

“Linley? Lord Ley, you are that genius master sculptor?” Lambert cried out in surprise. Lambert had previously stayed in the Holy Union. In the Holy Union, Linley was extremely famous.

“I hope you won’t reveal my presence or my whereabouts. Farewell.”

Linley squeezed out a small smile, then turned and immediately strode out of the hall.

As she looked at Linley’s departing back, the tears finally began to fall from Jenne’s eyes. She balled her fists tightly, her nails piercing into her palm’s flesh.

On the streets of the prefectural city of Cerre.

Rebecca and Leena were seated on the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru. Bebe was comfortably resting in Leena’s arms, while Linley, dressed in his warrior’s outfit, was walking alongside Zassler, who was in a long magus robe.

They were travelling towards the provincial capital of Basil at high speed.

The provincial capital of Basil was a huge city that could be seen from far away.

And just like that, Linley’s squad drew close to and entered the provincial capital of Basil.

“No need to rush out and find that Perry right away. Let’s find a place to stay first.” Linley said.

Zassler nodded as well.

There were definitely quite a few people named Perry in the provincial capital. Most likely, finding the right one would take some time. Thus, Linley and Zassler went to a hotel and reserved an individual, stand-alone manor, where their party now stayed.

Two days after Linley's party had arrived at the provincial capital of Basil, the Bluewind Hawks of Count Perry arrived at the Sacred Isle of the Radiant Church.

The Sacred Isle was a lonely place, located outside the Yulan continent.

The entire Sacred Isle was only a few dozen kilometers long. In truth, in the past, this was a secret base for the Radiant Church. Now, it had been directly converted into their main headquarters.

It had a Radiant Temple that was nine floors high.

This Radiant Temple wasn't as huge as the Radiant Temple of Fenlai City, but it, too, had been painstakingly constructed by the Radiant Church, costing a great deal of effort.

On the ninth floor of the Radiant Temple.

Heidens was seated in front of a window. Through the window, he could see the boundless blue ocean waters beyond the island.

Recently, Heidens had been in fairly good mood. The squad of experts of the ninth rank he had sent out had already successfully captured the Arch Magus necromancer, Zassler. And two days ago, he had received another excellent news. In the Eighteen Northern Duchies, his forces had made a tremendous discovery – five potential vessels of the eighth rank.

Generally speaking, an ordinary person would be able to train their bodies to the sixth rank. That was the maximum limit.

Some geniuses could reach the seventh rank just by focusing on training their body.

But...in the Eighteen Northern Duchies, the forces of the Radiant Church had discovered five siblings, all exceedingly strong and durable. None of them had any battle-qi. But all of them had reached the eighth rank as warriors, just based on physical strength.

"Vessels of the eighth rank. That will definitely be enough to allow Seraphims, the Six-Winged Angels, to display their power." Heidens couldn't help but be excited. "Five bodies of the eighth rank. When the Angels possess them, they will definitely be able to transform into five peak-stage Saint-level combatants."

Early-stage, middle-stage, and peak-stage Saint-level combatants were on totally different levels of power.

Currently, the entire Radiant Church only had five peak-stage Saint-level combatants. But once those five specimens of the eighth rank were brought over, the peak-stage Saint-level experts under the Radiant Church would instantly double!

"By then, would the Cult of Shadows still be able to stand against us?" Heidens face was covered in smiles.

"Your Holiness."

"Enter." Heidens face regained its usual calm.

A Vicar walked in, respectfully presenting a letter to the Holy Emperor. "Your Holiness, this is a secret message from our supervisor in the O'Brien Empire's Northwest Administrative Province."

“Oh?” Heidens raised an eyebrow.

The supervisors in the outside areas, aside from their annual reports, would almost never send secret messages. If a secret message was sent out, then it meant that something major has occurred.

“Could it be that...?” Heidens suddenly remembered that not too long ago, Lampson and his men had just escorted that Arch Magus necromancer into the Northwest Administrative Province.

Heidens immediately accepted the letter, opening the envelope.

As soon as he saw its contents, Heidens’ face sank down. “Have Lord Stehle [Shi’tē’lei] come see me.”

“Lord Stehle?” The Vicar was surprised.

In the Radiant Church, the leader of the Ascetics was Lord Fallen Leaf. As for the Special Executors of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, their leader was Stehle.

Lord Stehle was only a Special Executor.

But in terms of power, he was on par with the leader of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, Praetor Osenno. Both were peak-stage Saint-level combatants. In times of peace, the Radiant Church rarely sent peak-stage Saint-level combatants out on missions.

“Hurry.” Heidens barked.

The Vicar immediately came to his senses and hurriedly said, “Yes, Your Holiness.”

Watching the Vicar depart, Heidens began to frown. “So it seems Lampson’s squad had arrived half a month ago in the Northwest Administrative Province. But there has been no news from our borders informing me of their return to the Holy Union. It seems...they really have been killed.”

Lampson and ten other experts of the ninth rank had all died.

This setback was not a small one, but Heidens was able to maintain his calm.

After all, what the Radiant Church truly relied on was Saint-level combatants. As long as their Saint-level combatants remained, the Radiant Church wouldn’t be threatened at its core.

“Lampson and the other five were escorting Zassler. Given their ability, one or two combatants of the ninth rank wouldn’t be able to deal with them.” Heidens frowned. “Could it have been a Saint-level combatant? The McKenzie of the Northwest Administrative Province?”

Heidens couldn’t think of any other possibilities besides McKenzie.

“McKenzie!” Heidens was filled with a murderous intent.

To Heidens, those eleven combatants of the ninth rank put together weren’t as valuable as a single Zassler. Zassler’s true value lay not in the man himself, but rather in the training method for Necromantic Magic. As a type of magic on par with Oracular Magic, it was naturally extremely powerful.

It included maledictive spells, poison gases, plague spells, undead slaves, and the Wraith Call ability. These were all extremely powerful.

The Radiant Church didn’t reject necromancers from their ranks.

So long as a necromancer was willing to serve them, they would totally be willing to give this necromancer the title of Special Executor. The dark underbelly of the Radiant Church that was the Ecclesiastical Tribunal possessed experts of all types and places.

Heidens didn't know that the person who had killed Lampson and his men was Linley. If he had known, Heidens would probably be so angry that he would jump up and down.

"Your Holiness." An ice-cold voice rang out.

"Stehle. Come in." Heidens said warmly.

Stehle was only 1.7 meters tall. In the Yulan continent, he would be considered a fairly small and skinny person. He had short white hair, and his eyes were as sharp as knife blades. Judging from his appearance, he seemed to be a middle-aged man.

"Your Holiness, is there something you need?" Stehle asked directly.

Heidens was very direct as well. "According to our reports, Lampson and his men are most likely all dead. There is a high chance that the killer is a Saint-level combatant of the O'Brien Empire."

Stehle remained silent.

"I am going to send you to the North Sea Administrative Province of the O'Brien Empire. When you get there, you will meet with another group which is escorting a number of prisoners. No matter what happens, you must ensure that those five siblings are brought back to the Sacred Isle."

"And if I encounter Saint-level combatants of the O'Brien Empire?" Stehle asked.

"Kill them, and then fly back with those five at maximum speed." Heidens said emotionlessly.

Once they used those five bodies of the eighth rank as vessels for Angels to descend into, the Radiant Church would have produced five peak-stage Saint-level combatants. For the sake of that, it would be worth it if they had to offend the O'Brien Empire. After all, even if they offended the O'Brien Empire, at worst the Holy Empire would just have to give the O'Brien Empire some sort of compensation.

"Alright. I immediately will head out tonight, at nightfall." Stehle said indifferently.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 31, Concealed by the Night

There had been no trace of Linley in over three years. It was impossible for Heidens to connect this affair with Linley. What's more, even if he did think of Linley, he wouldn't think that Linley had the ability to kill six experts of the ninth rank.

Unfortunately...

Heidens didn't know that Linley had grown, grown at a speed even faster than he had feared.

Within a secluded restaurant in the provincial capital of Basil.

Linley was seated by himself, with Bebe being his only companion. They occasionally were drinking.

"Come over here." Linley called to the waiter.

"Is there something you need, sir?" That waiter was extremely courteous.

Linley casually tossed out three gold pieces. "Let me ask you a question. If I'm satisfied with your answer, these three gold pieces are yours." This waiter's yearly salary was only around four gold pieces. His eyes immediately lit up with greed.

"Sir, please ask. I know quite a few things in this province." The servant said confidently.

In a place like this restaurant, all sorts of people would come and visit. The servant would overhear a great deal and know a great deal as well.

"I want to ask you, is there an old man named 'Perry' within this city of Basil? His hair is white, and he should appear rather dignified." Linley whispered into the waiter's ears.

The waiter immediately let out a confident laugh, and then, very conscientiously, lowered his voice in response. "You must be referring to Count Perry."

"Count Perry?"

Linley's eyes lit up.

The waiter nodded. "In the provincial capital of Basil, there's only one noble named Perry who is fairly well known. And this Perry is, indeed, an old man, so old that his hair is white. There's no mistaking it."

"Oh." Linley nodded. "Do you know where Count Perry's manor is?"

The servant nodded. "Of course. Count Perry lives on Huating Road, the third residence from the right."

"If you come with me, I'll add another three gold coins." Linley said.

After all, Linley was worried that he might get lost by himself. It was better to bring the servant with him. This way, at least he wouldn't get totally lost.

Watching Linley bring out another three gold coins, the servant immediately grew excited. “Alright. Sir, please wait a bit. I’ll go talk to the boss first.”

If he didn’t do anything that day, at worst he would be deducted a day’s pay. But by following Linley, he would be paid three gold coins.

The provincial capital of Basil. Huating Road.

Linley stared from afar at an ancient looking manor. Judging from the decaying, ivy-wrapped walls, this manor was at least several centuries old.

“Count Perry, a very kind fellow?”

Linley sneered.

This ‘very kind fellow’ the waiter described was the supervisor of affairs for the Radiant Church in the Northwest Administrative Province. The O’Brien Empire was extremely antagonistic towards foreign religions. If Perry were to be discovered, he would definitely be found guilty of a serious crime, to be punished by having his belongings confiscated and his clan wiped out.

Memorizing the address, Linley immediately turned and left.

But what Linley didn’t notice was a man staring at him in astonishment from a distance. “Here? He actually showed up here?” The man was amazed.

“Mm. It’s been three years. I didn’t expect to discover him here. It looks like I’ll receive that reward of five thousand gold coins.” The man was very delighted.

Walking on the streets, Linley did not notice any of the ordinary commoners who weren’t particularly strong. Naturally, he wouldn’t have paid any attention to this ordinary warrior who was only of the third rank.

Within the courtyard of the residence behind his hotel.

Zassler was seated beneath a large tree in the courtyard. Seeing Linley enter, he laughed. “How did it go? Did you find that Perry fellow?”

“Found him. He’s even a Count. His position isn’t that low.” Linley said.

Someone capable of becoming the supervisor of affairs for a province definitely wasn’t an incapable person. He would either be a wealthy magnate or a powerful noble.

“Haha, wonderful. Then tonight, let us...pay a visit.” Zassler’s laughed sinisterly, his eyes emitting a hint of green light.

Linley nodded calmly.

“Rebecca, Leena.” Linley raised his head to look at the two twins who had just walked in from the main hall. “Tonight, the two of you need to stay here. Don’t go anywhere.”

“Understood.” Rebecca and Leena both nodded.

Zassler laughed in the direction of the twins. “Do as I have taught you, and enter the meditative trance. In a few days, I will begin to commence the ‘Necromantic Initiation Rites’ for both of you.”

After having been with them for a period of time, Zassler had made the determination that these two twins were highly suited for studying Necromantic Magic.

In truth, the normal seven elements of magic (earth, fire, water, wind, lightning, light, darkness) all had fairly high requirements with regards to spiritual energy. But the higher level arts of Oracular Magic, Life Magic, and Necromantic Magic, had terrifyingly high requirements when it came to souls.

Of these three types of magic, Necromantic Magic had the highest requirements with regards to spiritual purity and soul analysis. Comparatively speaking, it didn't have much of a requirement with regards to elemental essence affinity.

"Necromantic Initiation Rites?"

Rebecca and Leena were both excited. This entire time, they had hoped they would be able to seek revenge for their parents, but they didn't have any power. But after learning Necromantic Magic, they would have sufficient power.

That night.

"Haeru. Protect Rebecca and Leena." Linley instructed.

To deal with a minor figure like Perry was an extremely simple task. Linley and Zassler would be more than enough. With Bebe present as well, there would be no chance of failure at all.

"Be careful." Rebecca and Leena said.

Zassler laughed weirdly. "In Basil, aside from McKenzie, there's no one whom I or Linley need to be concerned with."

"Let's go." Linley said calmly.

Both dressed in black, Linley and Zassler very quickly slipped out of the courtyard. The black-furred Bebe also stealthily followed the two, with none the wiser.

In the dark night, Linley, Zassler, and Bebe were walking in an alleyway.

"Huating Road must be ahead." Linley's memory was very good. Despite having a very complicated layout, Linley was able to totally memorize the layout after having walked through the city once. Linley, Zassler, and Bebe directly passed through the small alleyway and arrived at the outskirts of the walls to Count Perry's manor.

Staring at this ancient building, Zassler and Linley exchanged glances.

"Zassler, you need to be certain." Linley had never seen Count Perry before.

"Don't worry." Zassler's lips curled in a dark smile.

Linley led Zassler forward as they jumped directly past the wall. With regards to how residences were generally laid out, Linley and Zassler both had a good general idea. Usually in front was the main hall, while the second building in the back was where the owner would sleep.

But Zassler came to a stop in front of the second building as he began to mumble a magical incantation.

A short while later...

A grey smoke began to slowly drift towards the building. In a short while, the entire second building was covered by that grey fog. The fog continued to spread until it covered every single building in the residence. Watching this happen, Linley was puzzled.

Linley took a sniff of the grey fog. As he did, he felt momentarily dizzy, but then instantly recovered.

“What are you doing?” Linley said softly.

“I’m just putting the weaker people here to sleep. Upon reaching the seventh rank, a person can use battle-qi to counteract this fog. Perry is a warrior of the eighth rank.” Zassler knew exactly how strong Perry was.

“Who is it?!”

An angry roar could be heard, as an old man and three middle-aged men ran out from the room. The leader stared icily at Linley and Zassler. But because of the grey mist, as well as the fact that it was late at night, they could not make out Linley or Zassler’s appearance.

“Lord Count.” Three more voices rang out from the courtyard, as two more middle-aged men and a young man ran over.

The Count had seven experts at his residence; five of the seventh rank, two of the eighth rank.

“Who are you?” Count Perry barked.

“Heh heh heh. Oh, Perry. You’ve forgotten me?” Zassler slowly walked forward, while two powerful, golden-furred zombies materialized out of nowhere.

The mist began to thin, and Count Perry could now see him clearly.

“It’s you.” Count Perry’s eyes bulged from their sockets. He knew exactly how powerful Zassler was. Even five or six experts of the ninth rank wouldn’t be able to do anything to him.

Seeing Zassler appear, Perry understood that most likely, Lampson and his men had indeed met a violent end.

“And you are?” Count Perry looked at Linley. Suddenly, he started.

Linley’s appearance had long ago been distributed to every single one of the Radiant Church’s supervisors in foreign locations. Compared to three years ago, Linley’s hair was now a bit longer, yes, but his face hadn’t changed much.

“You are Linley?” Perry was somewhat shocked.

Linley smiled and nodded. “Count Perry, good eyesight. Zassler and I have quite a few things we’d like to discuss with you on this lovely night. Zassler, let’s move.”

“Kill.” Zassler immediately barked.

The two golden-furred zombies suddenly transformed into rays of golden light, charging at those other six men. Sudden screams of agony could be heard, as the zombies killed three of them in a blink of an eye, causing the other three to turn pale with fear.

“Clang.” That young man chopped down with his sabre on the body of the golden-furred zombie, but the only effect was that his hand broke from the impact. Golden-furred zombies prided themselves on their defensive abilities.

“Groooooowl.” With a low growl, the golden-furred zombie caved the young man’s head in with a single blow.

“Bang!”

A middle-aged man kicked viciously at a nearby boulder, sending enormous pieces of rock smashing towards the golden-furred zombie. But the zombie only charged at him, fast as lightning. Those pieces of rocks continued to fly at high speed at the zombie. “Bang!” “Bang!” “Bang!” One rock after another smashed against the golden-furred zombie, and it didn’t block at all.

Each rock contained thousands of pounds of force, but unfortunately, they did nothing to the golden-furred zombies.

“Slash.”

A black blur flashed by, and that middle-aged man fell to the floor in astonishment.

“You’re too slow, you big oaf.” Bebe growled towards the golden-furred zombie, then jumped back onto Linley’s shoulders.

The golden-furred zombie’s speed could be considered the speed of a normal combatant of the ninth rank. But compared to Bebe, there was a huge difference. After all, Bebe and Haeru were magical beasts of the ninth rank which specialized in speed.

The six of them had been killed by the two golden-furred zombies and Bebe in the blink of an eye. Those zombies were, after all, departed souls of the ninth rank. Those people didn’t have a chance against them.

Perry had silently maintained his composure the entire time.

When he had been selected as the supervisor for this region by the Radiant Church, he had mentally prepared for such a day. Only, what he had expected was that he would be killed by the O’Brien Empire’s men. He didn’t expect that it would be Linley and Zassler who killed him.

“Linley, it was you who killed Lampson’s men and rescued Zassler?” Perry questioned. Before dying, Perry wanted to indulge his curiosity.

“Indeed.” Linley replied succinctly.

Perry nodded and laughed. “You truly do live up to the name of being one of the descendants of the Dragonblood Warrior clan. In three years, your power has grown so much. I hope you don’t expect to get anything out of me, however. I won’t answer your questions.” A hint of a holy light had appeared on Perry’s face.

“Do you think that will do you any good?” Zassler sneered.

“Seize him.” Zassler ordered coldly.

The two golden-furred zombies charged at Perry at high speed, seizing him without giving him a chance to avoid.

“Linley, help me stay on watch for a while. I am about to ‘Soulscur’ him. Zassler instructed Linley.

Linley started.

Soulscour? Linley had never heard of anyone being able to ‘Soulscour’ someone. Even the Radiant Church didn’t have the ability to search and scour a person’s soul. But necromancers, as practitioners of the type of magic that involved souls the most, naturally knew far more about souls than all other types of magi.

“Soulscour?” Hearing this word, Perry was shocked as well. “Impossible.” He had never heard of a ‘Soulscour’ technique.

“Haha. Even if you were to die right now, it would be too late.”

Zassler walked in front of Perry. The five fingers of his wizened, chicken-claw like hand grabbed Perry’s head, while at the same time, Zassler’s eyes suddenly turned a deep green color.

“Uhhhh...ahhhhh....” Perry’s body began to tremble violently, while at the same time, he began to let out agonized moans.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 32, The Decision

Although Perry was already over two hundred years old, as a warrior of the eighth rank, his body was still very sturdy. But after Zassler pierced his claws into his skull, Perry's face and body began to turn ashen white, while at the same time, his body began to quiver violently, as though he were an extremely ill old man.

Linley carefully watched this sight.

"Soulscur." This was the first time Linley had seen this sort of technique performed. As one of the three most powerful types of magi, necromancers did indeed have some terrifying abilities.

After approximately two minutes had passed, Zassler's green, glowing eyes returned to their normal color.

Zassler glanced at the ashen faced Perry, letting out a sinister laugh, then released him. The two golden-furred zombies also released Perry. As for Perry, with his skull pierced by claws and his soul scoured, he was dead without a doubt. Like a pile of mud, he slumped to the floor and didn't move again.

"What do you think?" Zassler looked delightedly at Linley.

An expert like Zassler generally wouldn't feel pride upon seeing the astonishment and admiration of ordinary people. But during this period of time that he had spent with Linley, he had yet to do anything to make Linley truly admire him. After revealing this ability, Zassler was quite looking forward to seeing Linley's amazed expression.

Only the amazement of experts could satisfy Zassler's vanity.

"Very incredible." Linley sighed in honest amazement.

Souls were very amazing, mysterious things. They were the most fundamental component of a person, but people knew very little about souls. To recover a person's memory from his soul was something which Linley, at least, couldn't even begin to imagine doing.

"Heh heh heh." Zassler laughed delightedly, and then those two golden-furred zombies by his side disappeared, returning to their home in the realm of departed souls.

"Let's go."

Linley urged.

In the blink of an eye, Count Perry's manor returned to its normal calm. By now, most people here remained unconscious, while the corpses of the experts just lay there on the floor.

Within the private courtyard of their residence.

Shutting the door to the main hall, Rebecca and Leena very obediently lit the lamps as Linley and Zassler began to chat.

"What did you discover in Perry's memories?" Linley said calmly.

Zassler laughed delightedly as he looked at Linley. “Linley, in the past, I knew too little about you. I didn’t expect that you were such an incredible figure.”

“What did you find out about big brother Ley?” Rebecca’s adorable, large eyes widened as she asked with curiosity.

Zassler laughed, his white eyebrows jumping up and down. “Rebecca, Leena, your big brother Linley has quite a reputation in the Holy Union. His proficiency in stone sculpture is nearly on the same level as the likes of grandmasters such as Proulx. Do you know? When he was sixteen years old, he carved out a special sculpture. Can you guess how much that sculpture was worth?” Zassler asked, laughing.

“Sculpture?”

Rebecca and Leena glanced at each other.

To them, sculptures were things that were very hard to make. To carve out a sculpture that was accurate and detailed was already hard enough, to say nothing of making it have a special aura.

“How many gold coins?” Rebecca and Leena asked curiously.

“Ten million gold coins!” Zassler announced.

Zassler had actually gotten all of this information from Count Perry’s mind. Count Perry had received a ‘kill order’ from the Radiant Church regarding Linley. Naturally, this kill order had many details regarding Linley.

“Ten million gold coins, for just a statue?” Rebecca and Leena’s mouths hung open, very wide.

“Not just sculptures, by the way. Your big brother Linley’s talent as a magus, in the past, was the second best in history. But now, most likely in the entire history of the Yulan continent, he can be considered the number one genius. As for his talent as a warrior, you should already know.” Zassler sincerely admired Linley from the heart.

Genius.

Nobody would question that he was a genius. Linley’s performance had given testament to everything.

Rebecca and Leena immediately looked towards Linley, their eyes filled with astonishment and worship.

“Enough, Zassler.” Linley shook his head and laughed. “Enough of these bygone affairs. Tell me what you found in Perry’s mind.”

Zassler nodded, dropping his smile.

“Based on the information in Perry’s memory, the Radiant Church’s forces in the O’Brien Empire are fairly weak. They are all in hiding. They don’t dare to offend the War God, and thus in the O’Brien Empire, the Radiant Church has very few experts.”

Linley nodded slightly.

“From Perry’s memories, I discovered the identities of the various supervisors throughout the Northwest Administrative Province for the Radiant Church. We now can definitely shatter their entire web of power in this area.” Zassler laughed evilly.

Creation was hard. Destruction was easy.

To place a group of people in an area without arousing suspicion was extremely hard.

But to destroy this web of influence only required those people be killed.

“And in the other provinces?” Linley asked.

As far as Linley was concerned, just destroying their web of influence in this administrative province wasn’t enough. Only by destroying the entire operation of the Radiant Church in the O’Brien Empire would Linley be truly happy.

“If we kill all of the general supervisors and some of the important supervisors in all seven provinces, the Radiant Church’s forces will be like a beheaded dragon. In addition, the Radiant Church’s force structure in these areas all hinge around a single line of communication. Once the general supervisor and supervisors are dead, most likely their entire web of influence will collapse.”

The greater the blow to the Radiant Church, the happier Linley would be.

Zassler shook his head. “Just like how each supervisor in each prefectural city only reports to Perry, Perry himself only reports to the general supervisor for the entire O’Brien Empire, or the Radiant Church’s headquarters.”

“The general supervisor for the entire O’Brien Empire?” Linley’s eyes lit up.

So in the O’Brien Empire, there was a highly ranked general supervisor for the Empire? If they could seize this person and Soulscur him, most likely they would learn even more.

“Sadly, even Perry didn’t know who this person really is.” Zassler shook his head. “Perry only knew about a place he could go to exchange messages.”

Linley nodded.

But Zassler suddenly began to laugh. “But from Perry’s memories, I discovered another piece of interesting news.”

“Speak.” Linley looked at Zassler.

“The general supervisor of the O’Brien Empire issued an order. In roughly another month’s time, another squad of prisoner escorts will enter the Northwest Administrative Province. The general supervisor ordered Perry to carefully assist and welcome these people and make sure their secrets were kept.” Zassler’s lips split into a grin. “Per this order, it seems as though they place a very high importance on this squad. This squad isn’t the slightest bit less important than the one escorting me.”

“Oh?” Linley’s eyes lit up.

For this squad’s importance to be so high meant that the people they were escorting definitely weren’t ordinary figures.

“Do you know where their first point of entry in the Northwest Administrative Province will be?” Linley asked.

“It should be the prefectural city of Deco [De’ke]. Based on the initial planned trajectory, they won’t pass through the provincial capital.” Zassler said.

Linley nodded. He could totally understand this. The provincial capital of Basil had the Saint-level expert McKenzie present. Naturally, their route had to avoid this place.

“The prefectural city of Deco is roughly eight hundred kilometers away.” Zassler was quite familiar with the geography of the O’Brien Empire.

Linley said coldly. “Eight hundred kilometers? If we rush, we can get there in a day.”

If the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, were to run at maximum speed, he wouldn’t even need half a day. But running for so long meant that he wouldn’t be able to maintain maximum output the entire time.

But if they ran at normal speeds and left in the morning, they definitely could reach there by nightfall.

“In half a month, we will head towards the prefectural city of Deco.” Linley said.

Zassler nodded as well.

Time passed. Linley, Zassler, and the sisters remained within this residence. Zassler was preparing to begin the ‘Necromantic Initiation Rites’ for the two sisters, while Linley didn’t waste any time either as he trained continuously.

Linley didn’t actually have the opportunity to witness the ‘Necromantic Initiation Rites’ first hand.

Only Rebecca, Leena, and Zassler were inside their room, as they began the ‘Necromantic Initiation Rites’. Very shortly afterwards, Zassler left the room, then instructed Linley not to disturb the two.

A full three days and three nights later, Rebecca and Leena proudly left the room.

Over the course of those three days, they had been totally attuned with the contents of the ‘Necromantic Initiation Rites’. According to what Zassler said, these two sisters had very high aptitudes.

As for Linley, he continued to train in the fourth level of the heavy sword, the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’.

In the desolate wildness, a long-robed figure crossed the boundless plains like a whirlwind, flying east at high speed.

He had a skinny, agile frame, and his short hair was gleaming silver, looking like steel threads.

His entire body was covered by a black robe, and his eyes were very sharp. He stared east as he flew through the air at high speed.

“Five vessels of the eighth rank.” Stehle still remembered Heidens’ repeated instructions.

Those five siblings which were under armed escort could not be allowed to escape, no matter what. Five bodies of the eighth rank! Once the Angels descended, they would transform into five peak-stage Saint-level combatants.

“It has been a long time since I’ve killed a Saint-level combatant.” Stehle’s face had a hint of a cold, sinister smile on it.

Heidens had already stated that if a Saint-level combatant were to interfere, he could kill them. The Radiant Church would bear all responsibility for his actions.

The tenth morning after Count Perry’s death.

Linley was seated cross-legged on the floor, not moving at all. The morning mist covered the lands. Recently, Linley’s life had been very peaceful, even though Perry’s death had aroused an investigation by the city guards.

But this had nothing to do with Linley and his group.

Linley suddenly rose to his feet. The adamantine heavy sword in his hands suddenly stabbed forward, and an ear-splitting howl could be heard!

A wall roughly fifty meters in front of Linley suddenly quivered, a layer of dust shaking off from it.

“Boooooom.” A fist-sized chunk of wall suddenly turned into dust. The sand-like pieces of disintegrated stone slowly poured out, revealing that fist-sized hole in the wall.

No battle-qi had been shot out. Just by stabbing at the air, Linley had created a hole in the wall at fifty meters distance.

“Profound Truths of the Earth – Triple Layered Waves.”

Linley gently murmured, “These most basic ‘Triple Layered Waves’ of the Profound Truths of the Earth have finally been completed.” After leaving the prefectural city of Cerre, Linley had been pondering this the entire time.

And now, Linley had finally mastered the most basic attack of the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’; the ‘Triple Layered Waves’.

When the force of the battle-qi and physical strength in an attack was converted into vibrational form, the more vibrations that were created represented a higher rate of conversion, with lower loss of power. The ‘Triple Layered Waves’ technique had a very high level of loss conversion, but it was already extremely powerful.

After all, it was a totally different form of attack than one utilizing battle-qi and physical force.

“Linley.” Zassler was standing at the doorway, watching. “What sort of attack is that?” Zassler was quite surprised as well.

Zassler had seen attacks from Saint-level combatants.

But generally, what they did was chop out their swords, projecting battle-qi in distant attacks. But Zassler had never seen someone like Linley, who without visibly using battle-qi or any other power, could suddenly, silently, create a fist-sized hole in a distant wall. This was too bizarre.

“Even if I told you, you wouldn’t understand.” Linley laughed calmly.

After having mastered the most basic ‘Triple Layered Waves’, Linley knew that the farther up he went, the more difficult it would be and the more time would be required.

“Knock!” “Knock!” “Knock!”

Suddenly, knocking sounds could be heard from outside the door. Linley immediately walked over and opened it.

The hotel attendant said respectfully, “Sir, this gentleman wants to meet you.” An amiable, middle-aged man was standing next to the attendant.

The middle-aged man glanced at the attendant, and the attendant very courteously withdrew immediately.

The middle-aged man smiled at Linley. “Lord Linley, hello.”

Linley's face couldn't help but change. There were very few people who knew his identity.

"Lord Linley, no need to be too anxious. My clan's lord wishes to meet with you." The middle-aged man smiled.

"Who is the lord of your clan?" Linley frowned.

"Lord Linley, if you read this letter, you will understand." The middle-aged man withdrew a letter from his clothes and offered it to Linley.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 33, The Four Bros' Paths

Zassler walked out from the back as well. Hearing the middle-aged man address Linley by his name, he immediately grew wary. But after he reached Linley's side, he saw that upon reading the letter, a smile appeared on Linley's face. A very happy smile.

Zassler could tell that although Linley wasn't a sinister fellow, he was rather callous, focused utterly on training.

He had never seen Linley smile in such a happy, brilliant manner.

"Zassler." Linley laughed. "You stay here for now. I need to meet a friend."

"Sure." Zassler nodded.

"Bebe." Linley shouted towards Bebe, who was sleeping on the ground. Bebe opened his bleary eyes, staring questioningly at Linley.

"Come, make a trip with me."

"Haeru, you can stay here."

Bebe delightedly raised his head up at Haeru arrogantly, then scampered onto Linley's shoulders. Happily, he mentally spoke to Linley. "Boss, what are we going to do?"

"You'll know when we get there." Linley laughed.

"Lead the way." Linley said to the middle-aged man.

Within fifteen minutes, Linley and the middle-aged man reached a lavish, large mansion. From far away, Linley could recognize the figure standing in the middle of the main hall.

"Third Bro!" That familiar voice called out excitedly.

"Boss Yale." Linley was laughing as well.

"Squeaaaaak!" Bebe squeaked out delightedly as well. When they were at the Ernst Institute, Bebe had gotten along very well with Yale, Reynolds, and George as well. Naturally, they were quite familiar with each other.

Yale had matured quite a bit compared to three years ago. Right now, Yale was roughly as tall as Linley, nearly two meters tall. But Yale was slightly thinner than Linley, making him appear like a tall, skinny man.

That form-fitting black gentleman's suit, combined with a faint cologne, made Yale seem to have a very magnetic charisma.

"Third Bro, I've been worried to death over these past three years." Yale bear-hugged Linley.

Hugging his dear friend, Linley felt very happy as well.

In the past three years, he hadn't seen his dear friends a single time.

"I didn't expect that you would grow to be about as tall as me. These three years really have changed you." Yale sighed. Compared to three years ago, Yale didn't change that much, but Linley had.

Linley laughed loudly. "You were a year older than me to begin with. You just had a head start. Now that you are no longer growing, it's very normal that I caught up."

Bebe squeaked off from the side.

Bebe was very happy as well. It had been a long time since Bebe had seen Linley laughing and joking like this.

"Wow, Bebe!" Yale hugged Bebe, affectionately rubbing his little head. "I knew that you'd come. I've prepared some fine foods for you!"

Yale turned his head and glanced at the attendant, who understood what Yale desired. Very shortly afterwards, over ten attendants pushed food carts laden with food over.

"This is roasted meat delicacies from around the world. Bebe, have a taste." Yale laughed loudly.

Bebe's little nose sniffed the air, then his eyes immediately began to shine. Transforming into a black shadow, he charged towards those food carts. Watching this, Linley and Yale both began to laugh.

"Boss Yale, let's chat inside." Linley said with a laugh.

The two bros entered the main hall, which had been covered with all sorts of delicacies and fine wines. The two bros began to eat and chat.

"Right, Yale, what happened to the Ernst Institute?" Linley suddenly asked.

"It's finished." Yale shook his head and sighed. "The Ernst Institute was very close to Fenlai City and came under heavy attack by the magical beasts. You know, even the instructors in the Institute were only of the eighth rank at most. Most of the students were very weak. Facing all those magical beasts...how could they resist them?"

Linley nodded.

Students of the sixth year, the highest year, were just magi of the sixth rank. But the magical beasts possessed quite a few beasts of the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth ranks. When a large number of magical beasts charged over, it really was a disaster.

"There is no longer an Ernst Institute in the world."

Yale sighed. "I, Reynolds, and George left the Holy Union three years ago. These three years, I've been running around between the O'Brien Empire and the Yulan Empire. As for Reynolds, naturally he returned to his clan, while George returned to the Yulan Empire as well. I hear that George has done quite well for himself. He's managed to enter the imperial government of the Yulan Empire."

"Entered the imperial government?"

Linley wasn't too shocked. George was, after all, a very good person at organization, and behind George was the mighty Walsh clan. Success wouldn't be too hard for him.

"And Fourth Bro?" Linley laughed as he asked.

“Fourth Bro? He returned to his own clan and was delivered to the army by his father.” Yale laughed loudly. “Third Bro, just imagine. Fourth Bro in the army. Isn’t that unbelievable?”

Linley began to laugh as well.

Their Fourth Bro, Reynolds, was a very lively and rebellious person. But now, he was entering the army? One could imagine how miserable he was there.

“But last year, when I saw Fourth Bro, he seemed to have changed quite a bit. He’s much more mature than before, and he does indeed look like a soldier now. But as soon as he started to drink with me, he returned to his old self.” Yale roared with laughter.

“Boss Yale, what about yourself? I feel that compared to before, you have even more of a nobleman’s aura than in the past.”

Indeed. Dressed in that black gentleman’s suit, Yale’s nobleman’s aura could be clearly sensed by anyone.

“Nothing for it.” Yale laughed bitterly. “After leaving the Ernst Institute, aside from normal magical training, I’ve been focused on managing some of my clan’s affairs. Naturally, I had to sit through countless noble banquets. After so long, I’ve learned some of their mannerisms.”

Linley nodded.

His three dear bros had all embarked on path which belonged to them.

Government. Military. Market.

“And what about myself?” In his mind, Linley knew exactly what his path was. “Advance on the path of training until I reach the level of the High Priest, the War God, and Dylin. Stand at the very peak of the Yulan continent!”

The absolute peak-level experts possessed all the true power in this world.

To a Deity-level combatant, everything was but a joke. No one dared to offend a Deity-level combatant. They were the ultimate forces in existence in the Yulan continent.

Linley wouldn’t permit any obstacles to prevent him from advancing on this path.

Nothing would stop him!

“Third Bro, three years ago, when I went to the imperial capital, I saw your little brother.” Yale suddenly said.

“Wharton?” Linley’s eyes lit up.

Yale nodded with a laugh. “When I saw Wharton, he was very worried about you, since he didn’t know what your situation was. I told him you were fine, and that you were just training by yourself.”

“How is Wharton doing?” Linley asked.

“Don’t worry, he’s doing very well.” Yale said with surprise, “I didn’t expect that your little brother was even more muscular than you. Three years ago, he was already a bit taller than me. By now, he should be even taller. Those arms, those muscles. Damn!”

Linley laughed while nodding.

Wharton's growth was totally within his expectations. After all, every single Dragonblood Warrior in the history of his clan was extremely physically muscular. The weapons they used were the likes of the first Dragonblood Warrior's warblade 'Slaughterer', the second one's heavy pike, or the third one's heavy warhammer.

"Linley, your little brother, Wharton, really knows how to conceal himself. In the past, he had been hiding his power the entire time. But after knowing about your affairs, your little brother stopped doing so and began to slowly reveal his strength. A while ago, at the annual tournament for the seventh grade students, he shocked everyone when he defeated a warrior of the eighth rank." Yale sighed in amazement.

Linley smiled calmly.

A warrior of the eighth rank?

Right now, Wharton was of the seventh rank, and he could also Dragonform. Once Dragonformed, he could reach the ninth rank in power.

"After becoming famous, how has Wharton been doing?" Linley asked.

"Wharton was conferred the rank of Imperial Count. Right now, he's a rising star in the O'Brien Empire. In a few years, perhaps he will be recruited into the War God's College." Yale sighed. "In the future, he has a high chance of entering the Saint-level."

"War God's College? Saint-level?" Linley didn't actually wish for his younger brother to enter the War God's College.

To the venerable Dragonblood Warriors, entering the Saint-level was something which would happen without fail.

Linley chatted with Yale for an entire morning. Linley was now totally at ease, knowing that all of his bros were living good lives.

After lunch.

"Third Bro. This is a talisman of the Dawson Conglomerate. It represents your status as an elder. Take it." Yale withdrew a black talisman.

Linley was a bit shocked. "An elder?"

When Linley was at the city of Fenlai, he had already displayed the power of an early-stage warrior of the ninth rank. At that time, Linley was only seventeen. Given his natural ability as a magus, and as well as the fact that he could transform into a Dragonblood Warrior, the elders of the Dawson Conglomerate had come to the conclusion that he would sooner or later enter the Saint-level.

Since that was the case, allowing Linley to become an 'elder' of the Dawson Conglomerate was definitely a worthy investment.

"Just take it, on account of us being bros." Yale laughed.

Linley glanced at Yale. He understood that by accepting this talisman, it signified that if in the future, the Dawson Conglomerate ran into any difficulties, he would have to help out. After all, this talisman represented both power and responsibilities.

“Alright. I’ll accept it.” Laughing, Linley took the talisman. Even if he didn’t have this talisman, if the Dawson Conglomerate really ran into any difficulties, for the sake of his dear bro Yale, Linley of course couldn’t just stand by and watch.

“Thanks.”

The two bros were very close. Thus, there were many words that did not need to be said.

“Third Bro. I feel as though your aura, compared to three years ago, is much more restrained. Over the course of these three years, what level of power have you reached?” Yale lowered his voice and whispered the question with curiosity.

Linley didn’t hide the truth. “Beneath the Saint-level, I should be invincible.”

Yale stared with slight amazement at Linley.

“Enough for now, I have to get back. I’ll come visit you in a few days.” Linley laughed.

The North Sea Administrative Province. Within an ordinary little city.

Within a quiet, secluded courtyard.

“Lord Stehle.” A powerfully built warrior called out softly from outside a door. “It’s time for us to move.”

A moment later, with a creak, the door swung open. Stehle swept the man with his cold stare. “Then let’s move.”

“Yes.” The man didn’t even dare to breathe loudly.

Stehle left the courtyard. Only then did the people nearby let out relieved sighs. A glance from a peak-stage Saint-level combatant was enough to make a man’s heart quail.

“Quickly.” The man immediately urged.

The other men, escorting those five hugely brawny warriors, began to move as well. Those five huge warriors were 2.2 meters tall, and astonishingly muscular. Only, they were tightly bound by a dark golden rope. No matter how powerful they were, they couldn’t break free from these bounds.

Their mouths had been sealed as well.

“Mumble, mumble.”

The five siblings angrily tried to curse.

“Do you want to die?” One of the black-robed guards landed a vicious whip-blow on the body of one of the five siblings, but only left behind a faint white mark. “Fuck, their bodies are incredibly durable.”

While Stehle’s group was busy traversing one city after another in the North Sea Administrative Province, Linley was entrusting Rebecca and Leena into the care of the Dawson Conglomerate’s forces in Basil. And then, Linley, Bebe, and Haeru set out in the direction of the prefectural city of Deco.

“This troop escorting these prisoners only have two warriors of the ninth rank. This will be easy.” Travelling on Haeru’s back, Zassler laughed. “I wonder who this squad is escorting.”

“Zassler, the news of Perry’s death should have reached the general supervisor of the Church’s affairs in the O’Brien Empire by now, right?” Linley suddenly said.

“Yes, he should know by now.” Zassler said. “However, they definitely wouldn’t be aware that I can Soulscur.”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 34, In Dire Straits

The prefectural city of Deco was a medium sized city which held a population of three hundred thousand. As one of the cities located at the border between the Northwest Administrative Province and the North Sea Administrative Province, each day there were quite a number of people entering and leaving the city.

“We arrived.”

Seeing the city off in the distance, Linley came to a halt.

This jog, traversing 800 kilometers in six hours, didn’t tire Linley in the slightest. Actually, it was far, far below Linley’s maximum speed. Likewise, for Haeru, the Blackcloud Panther, it was also quite an easy journey.

“We arrived. The sun hasn’t even set yet.” Zassler turned his head to look at the sun, still high in the western sky, and let out a sigh.

In Perry’s memory, he held the exact location of the arrival, because Perry was planning to personally go to the prefectural city of Deco to welcome the party.

Linley and Zassler took up residence in a manor not too far away from the meeting place.

Having money made so many things easier!

Afterwards, Linley and Zassler began to quietly train, awaiting the arrival of the escort squad, who were going to ‘fall into their trap’.

After ten or so days, after having travelled nearly two thousand kilometers on the roads of the North Sea Administrative Province, Stehle’s men finally arrived at the borders of the North Sea Administrative Province.

“Giddyup, giddyup!” A man whipped his horse, urging it to go next to Stehle. He said respectfully, “Milord, we’ve received word that the supervisor for the Northwest Administrative Province, Count Perry, has been killed. Should we continue on our previously scheduled route?”

Stehle, mounted on horseback, was quiet for a moment, then said calmly, “Count Perry’s faith and loyalty to the Lord is without question. He definitely wouldn’t have betrayed the Lord. Continue on our original route.”

“Yes, milord.” The knight next to him acknowledged respectfully.

The knight actually wasn’t concerned either.

First of all, Count Perry was indeed an extremely ardent adherent to the faith of the Radiant Church. He definitely wouldn’t turn traitor. And secondly, even if they did manage to torture information out of Perry, they would at most ask about some secrets regarding the Radiant Church. They definitely wouldn’t think to ask about the plans of this squad.

In addition, this squad was under the escort of Stehle. What did they have to be afraid of?

By nightfall, Stehle's squad finally reached the prefectural city of Deco. Long before Perry had died, the Radiant Church's forces in Deco had already received their orders.

They had been waiting for this squad for a long time.

"Milords, tonight, just rest for a time. Food and drink have already been prepared for you." The supervisor for the prefectural city of Deco said respectfully.

An expert of the ninth rank asked, "Recently, you haven't had any problems, have you?"

"None." The supervisor said respectfully.

"Good. You can leave now. Those attendants, after finishing preparing the food, can leave as well. We don't need them here." The expert of the ninth rank said.

"Yes." The supervisor said respectfully.

Stehle dismounted and headed directly into the residence, in search of a room to stay in. "Seqalu [Si'ka'luo], call me when it is dinner time." He shut the door.

The combatant of the ninth rank assented respectfully.

Seqalu had been the captain of this squad, but with Stehle's arrival, naturally he would listen to Stehle in all matters. Seqalu closely inspected all of those servants. Seeing that they were all ordinary people, he no longer worried.

"Bring them out." Seqalu ordered.

The five siblings were immediately brought down from the carriage. Fortunately, the carriage was quite spacious, as otherwise, those five enormous siblings wouldn't have been able to sit.

"Listen up, the five of you. If you keep shouting and making noise, the first time you do so, I'll break your arms. The second time, I'll cut off your tongues." Seqalu said coldly.

His subordinates then removed the cloth gags from the mouths of those five siblings.

The five siblings stared angrily at Seqalu, but they knew that Seqalu was the type of person who meant what he said. The five of them didn't plan to be so foolish as to make things harder for themselves.

"Seqalu, there will come the day when we five brothers will kill you." The eldest of the siblings, Barker [Ba'ke], said in a cold voice.

Seqalu only let out a chuckle.

Others might not be aware, but he knew...that in the future, these five siblings would have been transformed into vessels for Angels. As for their souls, they would have been destroyed.

"If you have the chance, I'll welcome you to try." Seqalu sneered in response.

The Barker brothers had lived in the Eighteen Northern Duchies. They were orphans who had been raised by an old man, whom they called 'Grandpa'.

Grandpa owned an ordinary restaurant and made enough to raise the five of them. Ever since they were young, the five siblings had been extremely strong. Their Grandpa had previously been a warrior in the army as well, and so ever since they were young, he had trained them. Unexpectedly, the five of them were

astonishingly talented. When they were only sixteen years of age, their muscular strength alone had allowed them to reach the sixth rank. By now, the five siblings were thirty, and their physical strength had reached the eighth rank in power.

After their Grandpa had died, the five of them had joined the army.

Within their Duchy, which was one of the Eighteen Northern Duchies, these brothers were heroic figures, leading armies with impunity. In battles between Duchies, warriors of the eighth rank could be considered top-level figures. These five brothers possessed incredibly durable bodies and also very fierce attack power.

However...

In the end, they were still discovered by the Radiant Church's forces. The Radiant Church immediately had dispatched two nearby experts of the ninth rank to lead people to capture them. They had resisted, but when they did, the Radiant Church's men had wiped out all of their families.

The Barker siblings stared death at these men around them.

The five siblings previously had three wives and two children amongst them. The two unmarried ones also had women they loved, but now everything had been destroyed by the Radiant Church.

"They've arrived."

Linley had been paying attention to that particular courtyard every day. He saw that the previously empty manor was finally filled with people, and judging from the sound of it, quite a few people.

Zassler's eyes flashed with a green light for a moment. Laughing sinisterly, "We've waited for over ten days. Finally, it's time. Linley, when should we act?" Zassler looked over to him. They had definitive superiority of power. No matter when they acted, it would be successful.

"Later at night." Linley decided.

Zassler nodded as well.

The nearby Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, was pretending to hide in the grass of the courtyard. The time passed quietly, until nightfall came. The prefectural city of Deco grew quieter and quieter. By nightfall, it was almost totally silent.

Linley, who had been seated in the meditative position, suddenly opened his eyes.

"Let's go." Linley glanced at Zassler. "Be careful."

"Don't worry." Zassler laughed self-confidently. "I'm going to summon the departed souls right now." After just a few seconds, two golden-furred zombies appeared out of thin air. After a while longer, a humanoid figure wrapped in a black cloak appeared in the middle of the courtyard.

"What is this?" Linley glanced perplexedly at the black-robed humanoid.

"An Ancient Wight of the peak-stage ninth rank." Zassler laughed delightedly.

Linley nodded. His side had many powerful experts, while the opponent only had two experts of the ninth rank. What's more, they were attacking from ambush. This battle wouldn't prove to be challenging at all.

"Let's go."

Linley jumped directly over the wall, with Bebe and the Blackcloud Panther following close behind. Zassler, his two golden-furred zombies, and the Ancient Wight also followed behind Linley.

Soon, they arrived at that residence.

“Let’s act separately. I’ll go deal with the guards overseeing those five siblings, and then together, we’ll slaughter our way through each room.” Linley said in a low voice.

“Let’s move.”

The five Barker siblings were in one room. Outside the room were two warriors of the eighth rank standing guard. The two were fairly relaxed, casually scanning their surroundings while chatting.

“Hrm?”

The moment before their deaths, they seemed to have sensed something, as they turned to look. But all they saw were two devilish flashes of purple light.

Blood fountained out of two severed necks.

“Swish!” Bebe, Haeru, the Ancient Wight, and the two golden-furred zombies all charged towards the other rooms, while Linley hurriedly ran into the room with the five siblings.

Upon entering the room, the Barker siblings stared at this ‘monster’ in astonishment. His entire body was covered in black draconic scales, and spikes were emitting from his forehead and back. What’s more, Linley had a pair of dark golden eyes which chilled the hearts of those who saw it.

“Who...who are you?” No matter how bold Barker was, right now, he was rather shocked.

But the only response to his question was a violet flash of sword light.

“Swish!”

Struck by Linley’s ‘Bloodviolet Godsword’, those dark golden ropes all split apart. After having mastered the ‘impose’ ability, Linley’s usage of the Bloodviolet soft sword had reached a new level as well.

‘Impose’ was not restricted by weapon.

A fist could also summon the ‘imposing power’ of the heavens. A sabre or a knife could as well. Bloodviolet was sharp to begin with. Now, with Linley’s battle-qi permeating it, chopping through the ropes was a very easy task.

Seeing the ropes split open, the five siblings immediately understood that this man had come to rescue them. But before they even had a chance to express their thanks, suddenly....

“Fuck off!” An angry shout.

“Aaah!” A pain-filled scream.

The look on Linley’s face changed, and he hurriedly returned to the main courtyard. He saw the black-robed Ancient Wight moaning in pain on the ground, while the stone floor of the courtyard was now covered with cracks. Clearly, these were caused by the Ancient Wight smashing into the floor. In addition, there were hints of green blood on the ground as well.

“What is going on?” Linley was shocked.

Zassler, too, was very surprised. “Not good. There’s an expert here.” The Ancient Wight was a peak-stage combatant of the ninth rank, and its body was extremely durable. The expert in the room was able to injure it heavily and sent it flying in just one move. This was too terrifying.

“Bebe, Haeru, come back.” Linley mentally ordered.

Bebe and Haeru transformed into two black blurs as they returned to the courtyard. By this time, the five Barker brothers had walked out as well, but Linley kept his gaze focused on that room.

“Hrmph.”

With a cold sneer, a short, skinny man walked out from the room. His short silver hair looked like steel wire. This man looked very cold, especially when one saw his icy gaze.

Stehle glanced coldly at the Ancient Wight. “A necromancer?”

Turning his head to look at Linley and Zassler, he sneered, “I was wondering who it was. So it’s the necromancer Zassler, and that so-called genius, the Dragonblood Warrior Linley.”

All the higher-ups of the Radiant Church were very familiar with Linley’s Dragonformed appearance.

“Excellent. All of you are targets for the Radiant Church. Today, I’ll take you all.” Stehle’s lips quirked upwards, a cold smile appearing on his lips.

“Swish, swish.” Linley’s draconic tail swished about, slapping the ground.

Suddenly, an earth-colored light covered the entire ground of the courtyard. Everyone in the courtyard felt their head momentarily grow dizzy. Zassler couldn’t help but fall to one knee, but then immediately afterwards, another layer of earthen light covered Zassler, the Ancient Wight, the two golden-furred zombies, Bebe, and Haeru. They no longer were suffering from the effects of this gravitational power.

Earth-style magic – Supergravity Field.

“So it is as our reports say; not only are you a Dragonblood Warrior, you are a genius magus as well.” Stehle laughed calmly. “Your gravitational field is around eight times that of normal. I didn’t expect that in just a few short years, you would advance from the seventh rank to the eighth rank. Sadly, a genius such as you is going to die today.”

Stehle walked one step at a time towards Linley.

“Charge.” Zassler let out a low shout.

The two golden-furred zombies immediately let out deep growls, then charged towards Stehle. At the same time, Zassler and Linley’s allies all fled, as if by common agreement.

A cold flash of sword light.

The two golden-furred zombies were immediately chopped in half, collapsing within the courtyard.

“You want to flee?”

Stehle, in the blink of an eye, appeared in the air in front of Linley’s squad. He stood there in mid-air, wielding the longsword which he had just stained with the blood of the golden-furred zombies.

“It really is a Saint-level combatant.” Zassler laughed bitterly

Actually, earlier, when they had seen the peak-stage ninth ranked Ancient Wight be heavily injured in one blow, Linley had already known that things were not good. He knew that this person was most likely a Saint-level. And now, they knew that to be a fact. Saint-level combatants were able to fly at an astonishing speed. There was no way they would be able to flee.

Linley and Zassler exchanged glances. They knew exactly what sort of situation they had found themselves in.

“I thought today’s activities would have been very stress-free. Who would’ve thought we’d run into a Saint-level combatant?” Linley was extremely unhappy about this. His dark golden eyes stared fixedly at Stehle. “No choice but to go all out.”

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 35, The Profound Truths of the Earth

The night was as cold as water.

The cold wind of the deep night blew drearily. The squad that had belonged to Stehle had been wiped out earlier. Now, only Stehle remained.

Linley's side had Linley, Bebe, Haeru, Zassler, and the five Barker brothers.

The opponent's side had only Stehle.

But without question, right now Linley's side was in the weaker position. Even fleeing would be very difficult.

"The Supergravity Field's effects are ground-based. The farther from the ground is, the less its influence is." Linley knew very well that once a Saint-level combatant were to fly several dozen meters above the ground, they probably wouldn't feel the gravitational field at all.

Right now, Stehle was hovering roughly ten or so meters above the ground.

"Even if he is impacted by the gravitational effect, at most it would be around two times normal gravity." As fast as lightning, Linley considered their options and how they could stay alive.

Zassler said in a low voice, "Linley, Saint-level combatants can fly, but much like flying magical beasts, although they can fly very fast at high speeds, their turning speeds and aerial agility is only perhaps one or two times faster than combatants of the ninth rank.

This reasoning was very simple.

Just like when humans ran at top speed. They would be able to run in a straight line quite easily, but if they were to suddenly turn left, then suddenly turn right, then suddenly run backwards and forward again, you would be lucky to reach a speed of a third of your regular maximum speed.

Linley understood this logic, but he hadn't thought of it just now. Now that he did, an idea flashed by Linley's mind.

"What, you want to resist?" Stehle was wielding that sword stained with green blood.

"Bebe, Haeru, don't leave the Supergravity Field's area." Linley's dark golden eyes stared at Stehle in the air. "Saint-level combatants are very powerful, but he is a warrior. He has no way to counteract the effects of the Supergravity Field. If he wants, he can stay in the air. Once he reaches the ground, his speed will be halved or cut to a third. By then, he won't be any faster than me, nor will he be faster than you."

Bebe and Haeru both let out a low growl.

But Zassler frowned. His speed wasn't that fast.

“Let us face him. We five brothers definitely won’t allow ourselves to hinder you, benefactor.” The Barker brothers called out. The five siblings’ muscles began to ripple and bulge, making them seem like terrifying magical beasts.

Wielding the adamantine heavy sword in his hands, Linley stared at the mid-air Stehle. “Don’t be rash.”

Stehle was in no rush to act either, calmly staring down at them. As a peak-stage Saint-level combatant, how could he be worried about being unable to deal with these people?

“Speed?”

Stehle’s sharp eyes stared coldly at Linley. “This tactic of yours might be useful against those who just entered the Saint-level, but unfortunately...I reached the Saint-level centuries ago. Kid, the Saint-level isn’t as simple as you seem to think it is. The Saint-level isn’t just about using strength to brute force things; it requires a deeper understanding.”

Linley stood in front of everyone, sword in hand, staring coldly at Stehle.

This tactic was the only option available to him. Faced with a Saint-level’s speed, he had no place to run. His only option was to remain in the Supergravity Field. Only then did he have a chance at life.

“Whoosh!”

Stehle suddenly shot towards Linley like a released arrow, his black robe slightly fluttering with the wind. However, that longsword of his, covered in golden light, chopped towards Linley at a very ordinary speed.

But once he struck out with his sword, a cold aura seemed to pervade the entire courtyard.

Linley instantly felt as though he had entered a frozen realm. He had been totally surrounded by that freezing aura, while at the same time, the entire area seemed to have been locked by that aura. Although that sword was moving at an ordinary speed, it chopped towards Linley with an irresistible force.

The ‘impose’ level!

“Hrmph.” Slowly yet inexorably, the adamantine heavy sword in Linley’s hands began to move.

Stehle’s eyes suddenly brightened.

“Slash!” His ice-cold longsword suddenly split the air, increasing in speed tenfold. In the blink of an eye, it arrived near Linley’s body.

Linley’s adamantine heavy sword was like a fish in water, agilely gliding through the air to block the ice-cold longsword.

One was fast. The other, slow.

But the strange thing was, the two swords intersected.

“Ruuuumble.” There were no other sounds when the adamantine heavy sword and the ice-cold longsword struck each other. Only, the air itself suddenly shuddered. Linley’s dark golden eyes continued to stare coldly at the opponent.

Profound Truths of the Earth – Triple Layered Waves!

Stehle only sensed a strange vibration being transmitted to him, as though three deep, powerful attacks were viciously attacking his heart.

“Booom!”

A terrifying noise exploded forth from Stehle as his silver battle-qi wildly exploded forth in all directions from Stehle’s body. Every single ray of battle-qi easily shot through the surrounding buildings like needles.

“Careful!” Linley roared loudly, immediately allowing the Dragonblood battle-qi in his own body to explode forth as well, frantically trying to block that omnidirectional blast of silvery battle-qi, so as to protect the five Barker siblings behind him. But despite doing so, he wasn’t able to totally protect everyone, as several strands of silvery battle-qi still struck the five brothers on their bodies. “Slash!” Several dozen bloody lines were drawn on their bodies, but the five brothers had managed to survive.

“What astonishing defense.” Linley sighed in amazement.

Fortunately, Stehle had only accidentally exploded his battle-qi, resulting it in going in every which way. This was the only reason why the Barker siblings had not lost their lives, despite them being criss-crossed with bloody lines and wounds.

As for Zassler, in front of him was a lance-wielding knight who was wearing a suit of heavy black armor. This was the ‘Black Knight Captain’, one of the three primary peak-stage departed souls of the ninth rank under his command.

“Boom!”

The walls nearby all collapsed, and even the nearby manors were impacted by the vibrations. Some people were literally shaken to death by that omnidirectional blast of Saint-level battle-qi.

“Ah!”

“Help!”

The nearby folks all began to scream in panic. An explosion such as this woke up quite a few people in the prefectural city of Deco as well, and all the nearby citizens began to flee their houses.

Linley’s group only stared solemnly at the mid-air Stehle.

A small hint of blood could be seen at the corner of Stehle’s lips. Stehle wiped the blood off, and then stared at Linley in amazement. Finally, he sighed, “Linley, I didn’t expect that you have already surpassed the level of utilizing the force of the heavens and the earth. Admirable, truly admirable.”

Utilizing the force of the heavens and the earth was what was known as ‘impose’. This was the level which ordinary Saint-levels reached.

“He received this attack of mine without any preparation, and yet he wasn’t heavily wounded.” Linley’s heart had grown cold.

Stehle stared at Linley. He sighed, “Linley, I really feel that it is a pity. The current level of insight and understanding you have reached is roughly on par with most peak-stage Saint-level combatants. Generally speaking, the reason that most peak-stage ninth ranks are unable to break through to the Saint-level is because their insights and level of understanding is insufficient. But for you, the opposite is true; you possess a very high level of understanding, but your battle-qi is far from being sufficient.

Linley himself understood this logic as well.

“For a genius such as you to die like this really is a pity.”

Stele’s eyes began to grow sharp and fierce again. In a cold voice, he said, “Linley, so as to show my respect for you, I will use my most powerful attack to deal with you; the Ice-Bound World.”

“Actually, did you really think this Supergravity Field could affect me?” Stehle sneered, and then his body began to radiate a terrifying silver light. Stehle seemed to have transformed into the sun itself as his silvery light easily encompassed an area of several hundred square meters.

“My Supergravity Field?” Linley found, to his astonishment, that the earth elemental essence he had used to create the Supergravity Field had been totally wiped away by that silvery light.

Within several hundred meters, the area was the absolute domain of that silvery light.

“A twenty one year old could actually reach such a level.” Stehle continually sighed as well. Many people wouldn’t be able to enter the Saint-level despite working at it for hundreds of years. But Linley?

He was only twenty one, and yet he was at such a high level of understanding.

“Bebe, Haeru, get ready to flee.” Linley transmitted mentally.

“Boss.” Bebe began to grow anxious.

“Don’t dawdle!” Linley mentally roared angrily.

Bebe and Haeru roared with fury, but they had no choice either. Right now, neither the five Barker brothers nor Zassler knew what to say.

Linley stood in front of all of them, staring at Stehle.

“My only choice is to use the higher levels of the Profound Truths of the Earth, which I haven’t truly mastered yet.” Linley’s dark golden eyes were fixed on his opponent’s. His adamantine heavy sword was in his hands.

The ‘Triple Layered Waves’ of the Profound Truths of the Earth was only the basics.

This most basic ‘Triple Layered Waves’, Linley was able to unleash with a 100% success right now. As for the higher level attacks, Linley was much less confident. But right now, he had no choice but to give it a shot.

“Aside from the Profound Truths of the Earth, I also have that other, dangerous technique.” Linley’s eyes slowly began to turn red.

“Groooooowl!”

Linley hunched over. Suddenly, his dragon-scale covered legs kicked off the ground, blasting his body upwards like an enormous boulder from a catapult, smashing viciously towards the mid-air Stehle.

“Go back down.” Stehle coldly swung his sword down at Linley.

“Ah!!!!” Linley suddenly howled. The adamantine heavy sword in his right hand chopped viciously at Stehle with boundless strength and fury, while at the same time, his left hand flashed with a beautiful violet light.

The divine artifact – Bloodviolet Godsword.

The same moment he had drawn Bloodviolet, Linley had sent his spiritual energy into it, activating its terrifying, baleful presence. The entirety of Bloodviolet was now totally covered by that bloody red light.

“Bam!”

With Linley at the center, a surge of red, baleful light enveloped Linley. Even people hundreds of meters away began to scream in terror, and even the five Barker siblings were so terrified that they started quivering.

“Ah!!!”

Even Zassler’s heart was also filled with fear. From a distance, people who saw Linley in the air, surrounded by that baleful red aura, all felt that he definitely must be a fiendish god whom they dared not rebel against.

As for Stehle, who was closest to Linley?

Stehle only felt a terrifying baleful aura completely envelope him. This baleful aura was even more terrifying than the aura which had been given off by Dylin, the King of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. That dense baleful aura entered his body, striking directly at his mind and soul.

“Kill!”

“Kill!”

Strange voices chanted nonstop in his mind.

Stehle felt as though he had returned to his youth, when he was a young beggar. He felt the same unbounded terror he had then, when each day he would be whipped by the leader of those men.

But the hearts of Saint-level combatants were extremely resolute.

“Ah.” Stehle suppressed the terror he felt, allowing the silver battle-qi in his body to explode. Under this sort of situation, Stehle was only able to utilize half of his power.

“Die!”

Linley’s eyes were totally red, and he chopped down at Stehle with his adamantine heavy sword.

“Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!”

The adamantine heavy sword collided three times with Stehle’s sword. Each time, Linley’s right arm went numb from the shock, to the point where his hand was beginning to split open.

“Swish!”

“Swish!”

In the same time that the adamantine heavy sword had attacked three times, Bloodviolet had slashed over ten times as well. Each of the strange attacks chopped at the same location. Although Stehle’s battle-qi was very dense, the eighth sword blow had managed to pierce it. The ninth and tenth attacks actually pierced into Stehle’s muscles, but Stehle’s body was filled with that dense battle-qi as well.

Linley was unable to remain standing in mid-air. After delivering these ten blows, he began to sink downwards towards the ground.

“Hrmph.”

Stehle's eyes had already turned cold. To be forced by a mere peak-stage combatant of the ninth rank to such a state was an absolute humiliation. Stehle let out a growl. "The Ice-Bound World!"

While following, Linley saw that in the sky, a mirage of a shadow of a sword had split space-time itself. In the blink of an eye, it reached his body. At this moment...this illusionary shadow of a sword seemed to have wiped away the entire world. In Linley's world, the only thing which existed was this illusionary sword.

Linley didn't have any time to block.

Zassler, the five Barker brothers, and those people watching from afar felt that the surrounding temperature had dropped to an extremely, terrifyingly low degree. Frost began to gather on their eyebrows.

At the same time, the longsword in Stehle's hands pierced towards Linley's heart.

But Linley didn't react at all, allowing the longsword to pierce towards him at will...

"Master!"

"Boss!"

Haeru and Bebe, these two magical beasts, could only watch helplessly as Linley was about to be killed.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 36, True Experts

This sword attack by Stehle, in terms of level, had surpassed that of the ‘impose’ level. If the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ of the adamantine heavy sword was one sort of special attack, then this attack by Stehle could be summarized using a single word: Fast!

“I’m going to die?” Linley was filled with resentment and an unwillingness to die. He wanted to live. He hadn’t yet attained his goals.

But unfortunately, in this world, many people died at times and places not of their choosing. After all, the world didn’t revolve around any person. Many events would not cater to their desires.

“Boss.”

Bebe’s tears had already begun to flow.

But suddenly, Bebe was stunned.

Not just Bebe. Haeru, Zassler, the Black Knight Captain, the five Barker brothers, and even the far away group of onlookers were all stunned.

“What’s going on?” Everyone was flabbergasted.

Linley was standing on the ground right now, while Stehle was stabbing down towards Linley from the sky. His sword was very, very close to Linley’s forehead.

But the two of them didn’t move; they were frozen in position.

Even the drop of blood dripping down from Linley’s injured right hand had frozen in mid-air.

At this moment, it was as though the entirety of spacetime around Linley and Stehle had suddenly frozen. Objects, bodies...everything was paralyzed.

Not just them. Bebe, Haeru, Zassler, the five Barker siblings. All of them were frozen.

Silence!

A gloomy feeling. A terrible sense of loneliness and quiet.

A look of astonishment was in Stehle’s eyes.

“Master Linley. Long time no see.”

A gentle, playful voice rang out. A seemingly thirty-something year old man with long black hair, dressed in a loose robe, walked over. He looked the same as he always did; as though he had just woken up.

“Stehle, right? All of you young fellows have reached the peak of the Saint-level. If I still didn’t advance, I really would feel too ashamed to meet anyone.” The lazy man dressed in the loose robe waved his hand. As though struck by a mountain, Stehle was sent flying backwards as though he were a meteor.

“Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!”

Stehle’s body slammed through over ten stone walls before finally hitting the ground.

“Linley, I haven’t seen you in around three years, yes?” The indolent man beamed at Linley. At this moment, Linley suddenly felt as though he could move again. Bebe, Haeru, Zassler, and the five Barker brothers all regained their movement ability as well.

That terrifying suppressive aura had vanished.

“Lord Cesar.” Linley immediately paid his grateful respects. Linley felt more gratitude towards Cesar than he ever had before. Just now, he had truly felt it was totally hopeless. The man had just saved his life. How could he not be grateful?

The person who had come was indeed Cesar. The King of Killers.

Zassler and the others all stared in astonishment, their mouths hanging open. What they had seen just then was simply too bizarre. And, faced with this man, Stehle was totally unable to resist at all.

The sound of stones rumbling could be heard. Stehle climbed to his feet. Although his face was covered in dust and dirt, he still walked over, staring with disbelief at Cesar.

“You...you...this....this...” Stehle was in total shock.

“This what? Haha, tell me. This what?” Cesar grinned evilly at Stehle.

Stehle had totally lost the demeanor and poise of an expert, only staring in Cesar in utter astonishment. He stammered, “God...God...Godrealm?!”

“Godrealm?”

Linley and Zassler were both astonished as well.

No wonder Stehle had been so astonished. Just now, when everything had suddenly been frozen in place, was the legendary power of a “Godrealm”. Only a Deity-level could utilize this power.

Right now, the Yulan continent had four supreme experts – War God O’Brien, the High Priest, and the Kings of the Forest of Darkness and the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts.

But now...this King of Killers, Cesar, had his own Godrealm?

“Haha...” Cesar laughed.

“Lord Cesar.” Linley and the others stared at Cesar in astonishment.

Cesar beamed as he stroked his mustache. “Don’t be surprised. Stehle, you and the others have been too arrogant. Hell, your old man, Cesar, reached the peak of the Saint-level over five thousand years ago, and my speed of training was far faster than yours. I’m a genius, you know.”

Cesar spat out a bit of saliva, harrumphing as he continued. “But your old man was stuck at the peak of the Saint-level for over five thousand years. If I still couldn’t find a way to break through, I really would feel ashamed. Thus, two years ago, I finally broke through that tiny little barrier.”

Stehle, Linley, Zassler, and the others all remained silent.

Good heavens.

Just like that, another Deity-level combatant had been born.

Linley found it understandable, actually. According to what Grandpa Doehring had said, Cesar was a person from Doehring Cowart's era, and even back then, he was a Saint-level expert. To break through after five thousand years and finally reach the Deity-level wasn't exactly something which happened out of nowhere.

"Lord Cesar."

Stehle bowed respectfully.

Any Deity-level combatant was worthy of respect. Upon reaching the Deity-level, one could ignore the existence of even empires. They were the true, highest powers of the land. It wouldn't be too hard for a Deity-level combatant to wipe out the entire Holy Union, at most risking some serious wounds.

"What is it?" Cesar looked at Stehle.

Stehle said respectfully, "Lord Cesar, all these years, the relationship between the Radiant Church and you, Lord Cesar, has been quite excellent. I wonder if Lord Cesar would be willing to join us in the Radiant Church. As long as you are willing, Lord Cesar, I believe His Holiness, the Holy Emperor, would be willing to accede to any request."

This was a Deity-level combatant.

Most likely Heidens would even be willing to resign the Holy Emperorship to him. After all, with a Deity-level combatant overseeing the Church, the status of the Radiant Church in the Yulan continent would be totally different.

"Not interested." Cesar snorted. "Hell, over these years, your old man hasn't even been willing to manage the affairs of my own 'Sabre' organization. And you want me to work on your behalf?"

Stehle let out two awkward laughs.

Right now, most likely Cesar could stand in front of the Holy Emperor, wag his finger in the man's nose, then curse at him, and the Holy Emperor wouldn't dare make a sound. This was the prestige of a Deity-level combatant.

"Lord Cesar, if you are unwilling, we won't force it. But as for this Linley...he's killed many people of our Radiant Church. Lord Cesar, would you be willing..."

"Bullshit."

Cesar kicked Stehle in the stomach, but clearly, Cesar didn't use any force with the kick. "Linley is a master sculptore on the same level as master Proulx and the others. I don't have many hobbies. One is beautiful women, the other is sculptures. You want to kill Master Linley in front of me? In your dreams."

Stehle no longer dared to say anything.

Stehle was extremely frustrated, because this mission of his had been to escort these five siblings back to the Radiant Church. Those five siblings all had bodies that were of the eighth rank in muscle power alone. Once the Angels descended into them, they would transform into five peak-stage Saint-level combatants.

“Lord Cesar, that’s fine. The Church will of course give you face, Lord Cesar.” Stehle squeezed out a smile. “However, those five over there are people which our Church absolutely must have. No matter what the cost, we must take them back with us. I hope, Lord Cesar, you will agree.”

“Oh, those five? Take them. I don’t know them anyhow.” Cesar said casually.

The Radiant Church had indeed treated him quite well over the years. Thus, Cesar would give the Radiant Church face as well.

The five Barker brothers were astonished.

“Lord Cesar!” Linley said frantically.

“Linley, do those five people have some sort of very important relationship with you?” Cesar twisted his lips. “Doesn’t seem to be the case. Don’t bother with them, then. Just enjoy your own life. Why bother about theirs?”

This was Cesar’s temperament. He travelled alone, and acted as he pleased.

“Thank you, Lord Cesar.” Stehle was overjoyed.

Cesar beamed at him, then turned to look at the five Barker brothers. “Let me take a look and see who you are, that the Radiant Church would value you so highly.” Cesar swept the five Barker brothers with his gaze.

The five Barker brothers were indeed very eye-catching. Those 2.2 meter tall bodies and terrifyingly muscular forms. All of them looked like enormous bears.

“The five of you had best not resist.” Stehle walked over. Zassler and Linley wanted to stop him, but under Stehle’s cold gaze, Zassler and Linley could only laugh bitterly inside.

How could they stop a peak-stage Saint-level combatant?

Linley had just used both the baleful aura of the Bloodviolet sword as well as the most powerful attacks of the adamantine heavy sword. Despite that, he had only given the opponent the most superficial of injuries.

“Linley, no matter what, we five brothers would like to thank you.” Barker, the oldest of the five brothers, said loudly.

“These five fellows are pretty large, aren’t they.” Cesar’s playful voice rang out.

Stehle immediately responded, “Yes, they are quite muscular.”

Cesar looked at the five men. His expression, originally playful, suddenly slowly sank into a brooding look. He even began to slowly walk towards the Barker brothers, one step at a time.

“Why are you coming over?” The third of the five brothers, Hazer [Hei’sha], growled.

“Third bro, don’t be rude!” Barker growled back.

“Big bro.” The muscular man said unhappily.

Cesar quietly stared at the five siblings. By his side, Stehle was beginning to grow surprised. In a low voice, he asked, “Lord Cesar, what are you doing?”

“Stehle, you can leave now.” Cesar said calmly.

“Then Lord Cesar, I bid you farewell.” Stehle said respectfully. Then he immediately shouted towards the Barker siblings. “The five of you, walk in front.”

“I said you can leave now. The five of them will remain behind.” Cesar said in a cold voice.

Stehle was startled.

Behind them, Linley and Zassler were both stunned as well. Even the five Barker brothers were shocked by these words.

“Lord Cesar, you...?” Stehle stared at Cesar in astonishment. Just moments ago, Cesar had agreed to let him take the five of them away. But in the blink of an eye, things had changed.

Cesar’s expression was colder and grimmer than it had ever been. He stared coldly at Stehle. “Stehle. Listen clearly. Go back and tell Heidens this. If in the future, the Church’s men make any attempts on these five brothers, then don’t blame me, Cesar, for not giving you face when I slaughter my way to your Sacred Isle.”

Hearing these words, Stehle was totally shocked.

“If you leave now, I’ll pretend nothing happened today. Otherwise...” Cesar’s eyes glittered with a cold light, and a terrifying murderous aura began to emanate from him.

Cesar was the King of Killers to begin with. He specialized in assassination.

And now, Cesar was a Deity-level combatant.

Once Cesar made the decision to go against the Radiant Church, just by engaging in assassinations, he could probably kill all the Saint-level combatants of the Radiant Church without suffering a single injury.

No matter what, the Church could not afford to offend a Deity-level combatant, much less a Deity-level combatant who specialized in assassinations.

“Alright.” Stehle’s heart was filled with bitterness.

It was also filled with rage. Rage at how overbearing and domineering Cesar was being. But Stehle knew that the person in front of him was a Deity-level combatant. He was qualified to be overbearing and domineering. He didn’t dare to show his anger or to retaliate.

“Then Lord Cesar, I bid you farewell.” Stehle bowed slightly, and then transformed into a blur, disappearing from the scene.

Linley, Zassler, and the five Barker brothers stared at Cesar in puzzlement.

“In the past, Cesar was always so lazy and lackadaisical. So why did he grow so solemn upon seeing the five Barker brothers?” Linley was extremely puzzled as well.

Cesar glanced at Linley and his group. “Come with me and leave this place. There are quite a few onlookers here. And...I expect Saint-level combatants have already detected the powerful ripples generated by this battle.”

There actually were no Saint-level combatants in the prefectural city of Deco.

The closest Saint-level combatant was over a thousand kilometers away. Even Saint-level combatants would take quite a while to travel that sort of distance when flying.

Linley and the others immediately followed Cesar away from the battlefield. That very night, they left the prefectural city of Deco and entered the mountain wilderness. Only then did Cesar have everyone come to a rest stop.

“We’ll spend the night here for now.” Cesar sighed.

Right now, Cesar didn’t seem as carefree and unrestrained as he usually was. On the contrary, he seemed rather heartsick. Linley had the feeling that Cesar must have some sort of connection to those five siblings.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 37, The Undying Warriors

“Crackle.”

The bonfire was blazing. Cesar, Linley, Zassler, and the five Barker brothers sat around the campfire. Bebe was resting on Linley’s thigh, while Haeru was lying behind Linley.

Camping overnight in the wilderness was fairly dangerous. But who or what could possibly threaten Linley’s group? Especially with that Deity-level expert amongst them.

“Why did you save us?” The eldest of the five brothers said in a loud voice.

Linley and Zassler all turned to look at Cesar. This was a question they were curious about as well.

Cesar glanced at the five of them. He didn’t respond, instead asking them a question of his own. “Your father? Your mother?”

“All our relatives are dead. As for our parents? We were orphans since we were young.” Barker replied. They were now in their thirties. To them, who had spent their entire lives in the war-torn lands of the Eighteen Northern Duchies, growing up without parents wasn’t anything particular special.

After all, in those war-torn lands of the Eighteen Northern Duchies, orphans were a common sight.

“Orphans...”

Cesar let out a long sigh. “I didn’t expect that after all these years, the ‘Armand clan’ [A’man’da] whose fame shook the Yulan continent would fall to such a state.”

The five Barker brothers, Linley, and Zassler all started.

“Lord Cesar, are you saying that the Barker brothers are...” Linley had a guess as to what Cesar was saying.

Cesar nodded. “Right. These five siblings belong to the Armand clan, the clan of the Undying Warriors, one of the Four Supreme Warrior clans of the Yulan continent.”

“Undying Warriors?” Barker and his siblings all stared at each other in shock.

“How is that possible?”

The five brothers rose to their feet, stunned. They were orphans since youth. How could they dare imagine that they belonged to one of the Supreme Warrior clans?

Linley had already guessed the truth as soon as he heard Cesar say the words, ‘Armand clan’. After all, Linley’s own clan records included information on each of the Four Supreme Warrior clans; the Dragonblood Warriors’ Baruch clan, the Violetflame Warriors’ Hyde clan, the Tigerstriped Warriors’ Prey [Bo’lei] clan, and the Undying Warriors’ Armand clan.”

Five thousand years ago, these four clans indeed were extremely famous.

Aside from the War God and the High Priest, without question, the Four Supreme Warriors stood at the absolute pinnacle of human power. Although there were other so-called peak-stage Saint-level combatants, those peak-stage Saint-level combatants couldn't match the Supreme Warriors.

Power and insight; these were two mutually supporting, mutually complementing things.

For example, right now, Linley's level of understanding was very high; he had surpassed the 'impose' level, and was nearing the peak-stage Saint-level in terms of understanding. But his actual power was extremely weak. Naturally, his attack force was far weaker than that of a Saint-level combatant.

Historically, the third Dragonblood Warrior had used a heavy warhammer.

When he had reached the Saint-level, he was only at the level of 'wielding something heavy as though it were light'. But despite that, he still possessed astonishing attack force.

This was because his body possessed a terrifyingly high degree of power and battle-qi.

A person's strength and battle-qi were his most basic foundations. The higher one's level of understanding, the better one would be able to utilize those basics. For example, if your basics were at 100, but you were at a low level of understanding, your actual attack power might just be 50. But if you had a high level of understanding, you might be able to use all 100 of your attack power, or perhaps even more, reaching 200 attack power.

The Supreme Warriors, by their very nature, possessed several times more physical strength and battle-qi than other Saint-level combatants. Even if they were a bit inferior in terms of insight and understanding, their attacks would still be very terrifying. This was the natural gift of the Supreme Warriors!

There was nothing that could be done for it. They were able to gain an unfair advantage over others via their natural gifts.

"Your bodies must be extremely tough." Cesar sighed.

The five Barker brothers glanced at each other, then nodded. The second of the five brothers, Anke [An'ke], nodded and said, "It's impossible for us to train in battle-qi, but just through our muscle power, we are on the level of warriors of the eighth rank."

"Aside from the Four Supreme Warriors, how could anyone else possibly break past the natural limitations of the body and reach the eighth rank just based on their body and muscles?" Cesar shook his head and said.

Linley was now certain as well.

Only the Four Supreme Warriors were restricted to using their own special battle-qi cultivation methods and be unable to train normal battle-qi.

"Amongst the Four Supreme Warriors, the Undying Warriors have the toughest bodies. Their defense is very powerful, and their attacks are legendary as well. The only weakness is that you are a bit slow." Cesar sighed. "Barker, you and your brothers are so young, but you were able to reach the eighth rank just based on your muscles and bodies. Aside from the most physically powerful of the Four Supreme Warriors, the Undying Warriors, who could possibly achieve this?"

Linley nodded as well.

Right.

He himself was a Dragonblood Warrior, but if he were to try to reach the eighth rank based purely on physical training, who knows how long it would take? Even his younger brother Wharton, who trained in accordance with the Secret Dragonblood Manual, had only reached the seventh rank this year at age seventeen.

“Aside from the elders of your clan, I’m afraid there is no one who knows more about you Undying Warriors than myself. You are definitely Undying Warriors. There is no question about this at all.” Cesar said with absolute certainty. “And what’s more, the five of you possess an extremely high degree of natural talent. If you were to train using the ‘Secret Undying Manual’, then most likely you would have already entered the ninth rank by now.”

“The Secret Undying Manual?” Barker and his brothers were confused.

Linley explained, “Barker, the truth is, all of the Four Supreme Warrior clans find other types of battle-qi to be unusable. Only by training in accordance with certain special ways can we develop battle-qi. As for your Undying Warrior clan, you can only train using the ‘Secret Undying Manual’.”

“No wonder we couldn’t train battle-qi no matter what we tried.” The fifth brother, Gates [Gai’ci], said with a sigh.

“If the five of you had been in possession of the ‘Secret Undying Manual’, there’s no way you would have been caught originally.” Cesar sighed. “The Four Supreme Warriors all possess extremely powerful attacks. Amongst them, the Undying Warriors possess the highest defense, the Tigerstripe Warriors are the fastest, the Violetflame Warriors possess the strange Nirvana Rebirth ability, while the Dragonblood Warriors are the most balanced, possessing powerful attack, defense, and speed.”

Cesar was a man of Doehring Cowart’s era.

This was also the era when the Supreme Warriors appeared in the world.

“Lord Cesar, why is it that you treat us so...specially.” Barker said with curiosity.

Hearing these words, Cesar couldn’t help but think back to the past. His expressions grew complex. After a long time, he sighed. “Your ancestor, Armand, was the dearest friend and bro that I, Cesar, have ever had.”

Armand, the first clan leader of the Undying Warrior clan, was also the first Undying Warrior.

“Five thousand years ago, the Yulan continent was in the midst of what was most likely the most chaotic, most dangerous era I have ever seen. The Four Supreme Warriors appeared out of nowhere, while the War God O’Brien became famous after his titanic clash with the High Priest. The Yulan Empire fragmented, as did the Pouant Empire. The entire continent sank into a mass of fire and floods.”

Linley and the others all listened carefully, even though they knew this already.

“And this was just what was going on, on the surface.”

Cesar grinned at Linley. “Actually, that era was much more complicated than you can imagine. The Yulan continent had more than just our native experts. Even powerful combatants from other planes had descended to the Yulan continent.”

“Powerful combatants from other planes?”

Linley, Zassler, and the Barker brothers were all stunned.

“Right.” Cesar chuckled. “To you, these are all distant, far away events, but that era really was chaotic. Many Saint-level combatants lost their lives. In that era, Saint-level combatants were nothing special, because there were many powerful experts who had descended...including many Deity-level combatants.”

“Many Deity-level combatants?!” Linley felt his head grow dizzy.

“Right.”

Cesar nodded. “Actually, five thousand years ago, organizations in some higher planes paid a very high price so as to allow their people to enter the Yulan continent. There was a reason they did this. Linley, you simply don’t know how fierce, how ruthless those battles back then were. At that time, Armand and I joined forces as we roamed the Yulan continent. Several times, I nearly died, but Armand rescued me. But of course...I helped out Armand several times as well.”

Cesar fell silent at this point, as though he were reminiscing about past events between himself and Armand.

Linley was growing puzzled.

The Pouant Empire and the Yulan Empire had fragmented five thousand years ago. The War God had entered the Deity-realm and became famous five thousand years ago. The Four Supreme Warriors had also suddenly appeared out of nowhere five thousand years ago...

And now, according to Cesar, five thousand years ago, even experts from other planes had descended to the Yulan continent.

“Five thousand years ago, something incredibly major must have happened.” Linley thought to himself.

“Enough of that. By the time your power reaches a certain level, even if you don’t want to know, there’ll be someone who will tell you.” Cesar chuckled.

Linley suddenly had the sense that the Yulan continent wasn’t as simple a place as he had thought it to be.

“Actually, there’s no need to force many things in life. Look at me. I eat when I should and play with women when I want to. I’m as carefree as I want to be. How wonderful is that? But look at that O’Brien, and that High Priest. Don’t be mistaken by their fame and glory. In reality, they are under enormous pressure.” Cesar quirked his lips.

Linley, Zassler, the five Barker siblings, Bebe, and Haeru all silently listened.

Listening to Cesar, this Deity-level expert, casually discuss the affairs of the most puissant experts on the Yulan continent, Linley had a very strange feeling.

“Only after reaching the Deity-level will one have the power to move mountains at will.” Linley silently thought to himself.

Cesar glanced at Linley. “Linley, let me give you a word of advice.”

“Lord Cesar, please guide me.” Linley said very modestly, as though he were a student again.

Cesar nodded. “I know there is a very deep enmity between yourself and the Radiant Church. But right now, you are far too weak. Even if you are able to wreck some of the plans of the Radiant Church and give them some small problems, you aren’t able to damage their foundations at all. I recommend that you quietly train for a time first. I don’t ask that you train to an excessively high level. But at least, after transforming, you need to be at the Saint-level. That will be enough.”

Cesar had already realized that Linley possessed a very high level of understanding.

As long as Linley's level of power were to enter the Saint-level, then, aided by his deep understanding of reality, when faced with peak-stage Saint-level combatants, even if he wasn't able to win, he would still have the hope of escaping.

"Understood." Linley nodded.

"Barker." Cesar looked at the five Barker brothers.

"Lord Cesar." The five of them were extremely respectful. They now believed that they indeed were the descendants of the Undying Warrior clan. Since the man in front of them was a life-and-death friend of their ancestor, naturally they were very respectful.

Cesar nodded. "All of the Four Supreme Warrior clans have decayed. Armand's clan has now decayed to the point where even your ancestral training methods have been lost. Fortunately...in the past, during the course of the dozens of years I had spent travelling with Armand, I procured a copy of the 'Secret Undying Manual'. It should still be within the general headquarters of my Sabre organization."

Hearing these words, the five siblings' eyes shone.

They had just watched Linley transform. All of the Four Supreme Warriors had their own transformations. Even pre-transformation, the five of them had the power of warriors of the eighth rank. Once they acquired the secret manual, they would be able to transform...and by then, their power would increase enormously.

"However, there's a bit of distance from here to the general headquarters. Tomorrow morning, I plan to personally make a trip." Cesar said.

If those high ranking members of Sabre who had been personally trained by him in the past were to hear these words coming from Cesar, they probably would die from shock.

The 'Old Master', Cesar, was legendarily lazy.

There was over ten thousand miles distance from here to the general headquarters. This journey would be an extremely tiring one. For someone of Cesar's lazy nature to make such a long round trip was quite the feat.

"Thank you, Lord Cesar." Barker and his brothers said gratefully.

"No need. I hope that in the future, the five of you will restore the Undying Warrior clan's reputation and fame." Right now, Cesar was feeling quite emotional. Five thousand years ago, when he had roamed the world with Armand, at risk of dying every single day, was the most unforgettable experience in his very long life.

A night passed. The dawn came.

Nothing was left of the campfire but ashes. Linley and his squad all got up to send Cesar off.

"Lord Cesar, we will immediately return to a small town outside the prefectural city of Basil and settle down. When the time comes, you can just come find us there." Linley said.

Linley knew that Saint-level combatants could use their spiritual energy to search for people. As for Deity-level combatants, as long as you gave them a general location, it was very easy for them to find someone.

"Got it. Haha. Train hard, kiddos. I'll head off now." Cesar had returned to his usual lackadaisical, noisy mood. It was as though after that night had passed, he was back to his old self.

Linley, the Barker siblings, Zassler, and the rest of the group all watched as Cesar's figure flew through the sky at high speed, disappearing past the horizon.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 38, The Church's Strategy

After Cesar left, Linley's group immediately headed off that morning in the direction of the provincial capital of Basil. This time, they weren't in too much of a hurry. But for the five Barker brothers, who were warriors of the eighth rank, the speed at which they travelled was still quite fast.

By nightfall the next day, Linley's group arrived at a town near the provincial capital of Basil.

"This town is called Cloudpeaks Village." Zassler laughed as he introduced the town. "In the past, I spent over ten years in this small town. The people here are fairly honest and simple, and they rarely interact with the outside world. Generally speaking, very few people come here. It is quite peaceful."

Linley nodded.

What they needed was a peaceful place. This time, when he fought against Stehle, he had very nearly lost his life. Linley made up his mind that he would have to train until he was at least a warrior of the ninth rank in human form. That way, after being Dragonformed, his power would be at the Saint-level.

"If I can reach the Saint-level, then a few years later after that, when I combine my insights and understanding of the principles of using the sword with my superior speed, even if I encounter Stehle again, I'll still be able to flee, even if I can't win."

Linley had a very good grasp of the strengths of this mutated Dragonform he had.

After devouring the blood as well as the draconic core of that Armored Razorback Wurm, Linley's mutated Dragonform had inherited the strengths of the Armored Razorback Wurm; its speed and its defense.

As the five Barker brothers stared at the peaceful town, their eyes were firm and resolute as well.

"There will definitely come the day when I will get revenge for my wife and my son." Barker and his brothers also knew the state of affairs between Linley, Zassler, and the Radiant Church.

Without question, this group was now under the leadership of Linley.

This squad was completely composed of the enemies of the Radiant Church.

On the west side of Cloudpeaks Village, Linley and his people engaged in a quick transaction with some local nobles, spending ten thousand gold coins to invite many laborers to come and erect a new residence.

Ten thousand gold coins, in a countryside town such as this, was enough to build a very lavish residence.

The very next day, Linley brought Rebecca and Leena to this place. From this day forward, Linley's team all quietly took up residence here, focusing on their training.

"Rumble."

The ocean waves crashed against the shore, throwing up countless sprays of foam. Above the jade-blue ocean waters, a human figure could be seen flying over at high speed. In a short period of time, the human figure arrived at the shore. It was Stehle.

“Things have gotten complicated now.” Stehle was extremely frustrated.

The Church had placed a very high degree of importance on obtaining those five bodies. Most likely, it would even be willing to give up one of its Saint-level combatants or offend the O’Brien Empire to do so. In order to make sure nothing would go amiss, Heidens had even asked him, Stehle, to handle it.

But the result was...

Stehle stared at that distant, mighty Radiant Cathedral.

“Woosh.” Stehle once more took to the air. The knights surrounding the Radiant Temple, upon seeing someone flying towards it, couldn’t help but tense. Only after seeing that it was Stehle did they calm down.

Within the ninth floor of the Radiant Temple.

“Oh, Stehle’s back.” Heidens had already seen through his window the sight of Stehle flying back through the air. “What’s going on? Why did Stehle come back alone?”

Heidens had a very bad premonition.

“Creak.” Without any forewarning, the door to his room swung upon. Stehle, as cold as thousand-year glacial ice, walked in.

“Stehle, what happened? Where are they? Where are those five bodies of the eighth rank?” Heidens was frowning and he asked his questions hurriedly.

Stehle shook his head. “Your Holiness, acquiring those five bodies is no longer an option for us.”

“What happened?” Heidens’ face sank.

Those five bodies represented five peak-stage Saint-level combatants. Their importance to the Radiant Church couldn’t be understated.

Stehle said in a low, somber voice, “Your Holiness, originally, I was escorting those five brothers along the way. But when we entered the prefectural city of Deco, we ran into two people.”

“Which two people?” Heidens didn’t believe there was someone capable of stopping Stehle.

“Linley, Zassler.” Stehle’s voice was extremely cold.

“Linley? Zassler?” Heidens was startled.

This Linley had disappeared for three years. He now appeared out of nowhere?

Heidens couldn’t help but think back to three years ago. Heidens truly did not wish to kill an ultimate genius such as Linley. But he had no other choice. However, three years ago, after Linley disappeared from Hess City, no one ever found any trace of him again.

But now, Linley was in cahoots with Zassler?

“Are you telling me that it was Linley who had rescued Zassler?” Heidens’ eyes lit up.

Stehle nodded. “Yes. This Linley is already extremely, extremely powerful. Beneath the Saint-level, there’s definitely no one who can match him. Only Saint-level fighters or other extremely powerful fighters can defeat him.”

“Six combatants of the ninth rank. He can kill that many?” Heidens found it rather hard to believe.

Stehle nodded somberly. “Your Holiness, I must inform you that this Linley has two extremely powerful magical beasts. Both of them should be peak-stage magical beasts of the ninth rank. And in addition...in terms of insight and understanding regarding fundamental principles, Linley is already nearing the peak-stage Saint level.”

“Nearing the peak-stage Saint-level?” Heidens was very shocked.

After all, the higher one’s level of understanding was already at, the harder it would be to progress to the next level of understanding. There were people who would spend hundreds of years training yet still fail to improve whatsoever.

“Yes. Linley has already surpassed the level of using the force of the heavens. His current form of attack is extremely strange and unique. What’s more, I have the feeling that right now, he has only mastered a small part of that level. Despite that, he was able to cause me a light wound.” Stehle couldn’t help but reflect on how bizarre Linley’s attack using the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ was.

“I’ve never encountered an attack such as that. That sort of attack wasn’t based on battle-qi, nor was it based purely on strength. It was...” Stehle paused, not quite able to find the right words to express it.

Hearing Stehle say such things, Heidens was very surprised.

An attack which could cause a light wound to a peak-stage Saint-level combatant such as Stehle was already, in and of itself, quite astonishing.

“What was so special about his attack? How would one defend against it?” Heidens immediately asked.

Stehle nodded. “His attack could pass through the exterior muscles and transmit its force directly into the internal organs. In other words, exterior layers of defense, no matter how powerful, are virtually useless.”

“Oh?” Heidens frowned.

“This technique is a weapon aimed at attacking the internal organs of a person. In order to defend against this technique, the best method is to use battle-qi to internally protect all of the body’s internal organs, covering them all with a layer of battle-qi.”

Actually, these vibrations which Linley’s attack created, when passing through material barriers, would still lose a bit of power.

But because this was a sort of vibrating wave, no matter how high your external defense was, it would still transmit its power through your defense. However, if the opponent’s organs had a highly dense, concentrated layer of protective battle-qi over it, the vibrational waves would be slowly weakened by the battle-qi. By the time it reached the internal organs, its threat level would be rather low.

“There’s no way to completely defend against this sort of attack. The only option is to use a high amount of battle-qi to ameliorate its effects.” Stehle sighed in praise. “And, again, I have the sense that Linley has just recently begun to understand this technique. In the future, his attack will most likely be even more powerful. This can probably be classified as the strangest type of attack I have ever seen.”

Stehle had a very high opinion of this technique.

This made Heidens all the more worried.

“This Linley must be killed.” Heidens was now truly starting to grow worried. If Linley was to be permitted to continue to develop like this, he would pose a true threat to the Radiant Church.

“Continue. I’m sure the two of them weren’t enough to stop you.” Heidens said in a somber voice.

Stehle nodded. “Indeed. Both Linley and Zassler are only of the ninth rank. But just as I was about to kill Linley, a person appeared out of nowhere. Cesar. The King of Killers, Cesar!”

“Cesar?” Heidens said doubtfully. “He shouldn’t be willing to dare fight face to face against the Radiant Church directly.”

“Wrong. He dares.” Stehle sighed. “Cesar has reached the Deity-level.”

“Reached the Deity-level!”

These words were like a lightning bolt slamming into Heidens’ mind, making him momentarily feel dizzy. Yet another Deity-level combatant had appeared in the Yulan continent.

“Deity-level?” Heidens stared at Stehle.

“Yes. Deity-level.” Stehle nodded again.

Heidens was silent for a long moment.

“What did Cesar say?” Heidens said calmly.

“Cesar said, in the future, our Radiant Church definitely must not have any designs on those five brothers. Otherwise, he will shed all pretense of cordiality with us and slaughter his way to the Sacred Isle.” Stehle’s words were like a hammer to Heidens’ heart.

These five vessels of the eighth rank symbolized five peak-stage Saint-level Angels.

This was too heartbreaking. Heidens didn’t want to accept it.

He didn’t want to accept it!!!

“Why would Cesar say such a thing?” Heidens’ eyes narrowed. “Based on my understanding of Cesar, he’s a man who has no interest in power or authority. He enjoys living a carefree life. He wouldn’t spend a single iota of effort on a stranger.”

This was indeed the case. Cesar truly didn’t care about the lives or deaths of others.

“For a lazy person such as Cesar to be willing to go this far...”

Heidens’ eyebrows suddenly shot up, and his eyes lit up.

“I understand now.” Heidens sighed.

“What’s the reason, Your Holiness?” Stehle asked.

Heidens sighed yet again. “In the records that the Church has regarding Cesar, there was information regarding, in the chaotic era of five thousand years ago, Cesar’s experiences alongside his good friend Armand. The people whom Cesar truly values have always been the descendants of Armand.”

“The Undying Warriors?” Stehle began to understand as well.

“Right. I’ve always been very surprised how five bodies of the eighth rank could suddenly appear here in the Yulan continent. But now, it makes sense. Undying Warriors. The most physically powerful of the Four Supreme Warriors.”

Heidens was silent for a long period of time. His thoughts regained their normal clarity.

“We can’t touch those five siblings. That is without question.” No matter what, they couldn’t afford to offend a Deity-level expert.

“Linley’s level of talent is simply terrifying. We simply cannot allow him to live.” Heidens looked at Stehle. “Stehle, Cesar didn’t say that he would go to war against the Radiant Church for Linley’s sake, did he?”

Stehle nodded.

Heidens smiled confidently.

“That’s more like him. Although he likes stone sculptures, he definitely wouldn’t go to total war against the Radiant Church for the sake of a master sculptor.”

Cesar was an arrogant loner.

There were very few people for whom he would really be willing to go all out. And Linley was not one of them.

“Stehle, go and get some rest. When you leave, order someone to have Lyndin [Lan’dan] come.” Heidens ordered.

“Yes, Your Holiness.”

Roughly ten minutes later, the sound of knocking at the door.

“Enter.” Heidens said calmly.

A tall and beautiful woman with a head of silver hair walked in. Without question, she was a woman so beautiful as to make any man go wild. But that icy beauty of hers was the type that would make others not dare to approach her.

“Your Holiness.” Lyndin bowed.

Heidens immediately issued his order. “Tomorrow, take five Angels of the ninth rank with you and head directly to the O’Brien Empire. The goal for this mission is to kill Linley. In a while, I will have a scroll containing information about Linley delivered to you.”

“Yes, Your Holiness.”

Lyndin was a Radiant Angel who had descended into a body of the sixth rank. Although it was quite hard to find bodies of the seventh and eighth ranks, bodies of the sixth rank were quite common. Thus, the Radiant Church had quite a few Angels of the ninth rank.

“Remember, you must kill Linley, no matter the cost.” Heidens instructed yet again.

Lyndin started, then expressed assent.

Angels possessed astonishing power. Even the weakest Two-Winged Angels had early-stage Saint-level power. Lyndin's true power was very powerful; however, bound by the restrictions of their vessels, they weren't able to put them on full display.

But if they were to go all out...

They were totally capable of unleashing their Saint-level power in exchange for their lives.

Most importantly...six Angels were capable of forming the legendary 'Angel Battle Formation'. With the six of them joining forces, even an early-stage Saint-level expert would most likely be killed, to say nothing of Linley.

"Go."

Heidens said calmly.

They were just six Angels of the ninth rank, after all. For the sake of killing Linley, he'd be willing to sacrifice six more if necessary. After all, Linley's natural talent had truly terrified Heidens.

"He cannot be allowed to continue to grow!"

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 39, Time Passing Slowly

The O'Brien Empire restricted the worship of other religions within its borders, and so the Radiant Church and the Cult of Shadows were forced to keep their forces in hiding. If and when their forces were discovered, the O'Brien Empire would mercilessly stamp them out.

This attitude of the O'Brien Empire had caused the Radiant Church to never have the chance to expand its influence within the Empire's borders.

In important places such as the imperial capital or in the provincial capitals, the Radiant Church still managed to place quite a few forces in hiding, but in prefectural cities, they would have at most a few dozen people.

As for those ordinary cities, some places had a few people, others had none.

And the towns? No need to even mention them.

The density of their web of influence wasn't very high. Thus, the Radiant Church's forces which had been sent to locate Linley couldn't find any trace of him. They had no idea where this Linley had run off to.

Even though they didn't know where Linley was hiding, the Lyndin's team of six experts still departed from the Sacred Isle and headed towards the O'Brien Empire.

Outside Northwest Administrative Province's provincial capital of Basil. Cloudpeaks Village.

Linley, Zassler, Barker and his brothers, Rebecca, and Leena were all living here quietly. Aside from their training, Rebecca and Leena spent their time making sure Linley and the others were all fed.

The explanation they gave to the local villagers was that Linley was a noble. Zassler was his housekeeper, and the five Barker brothers were his guards.

Linley's team was located in the western side of the village, several hundred meters away from any other residences.

"Big sis, today the skeleton I summoned was so cute! It looked so silly." Rebecca and Leena were on their way back from the local market, carrying baskets of fresh vegetables.

Aside from their training, they spent much of their time cooking.

"Rebecca, don't always waste your time playing around. After summoning a skeleton, release it back. You are wasting too much time playing around with skeletons." Leena was somewhat unhappy.

Rebecca was too undisciplined. Every day, she would play around with and tease the skeletal warriors she summoned.

"I know, big sis. I'll catch up to you soon." Rebecca said in a low voice. Her sister was already capable of summoning zombies.

It must be said that both Rebecca and Leena were quite talented. They were progressing quite rapidly in the arts of Necromantic Magic.

The two of them walked to an empty spot of land. Currently, the manor which Linley had designed was still in the construction phase. And thus, Linley had erected a series of wooden cabins for them to live in for now.

“Big brother Linley’s training method is so weird.” Rebecca murmured.

Right now, Linley was wielding the adamantine heavy sword in one hand and the Bloodviolet Godsword in the other. In Linley’s hands, the adamantine heavy sword danced about as though it was totally weightless. But Bloodviolet was the opposite; it seemed to carry a thousand tons of force with each blow.

“Wielding something heavy as though it were light, wielding something light as though it were heavy...”

Linley had a hint of a smile on his lips.

Regardless of whether he was using Bloodviolet or the adamantine heavy sword, his level of understanding could be applied to both. For example, the ‘impose’ level could be used with virtually any sort of attack.

Sabre, sword, staff, rod, fists, or kicks.

‘Impose’ could be used with any of these.

This is why using it could be described as ‘calling upon the force of the heavens and the earth’.

As for the level of ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’, there was no way one could use it on the Bloodviolet Godsword, because this sword was already very light. After pondering for over ten days while seated meditatively on the floor, Linley suddenly became aware of how ponderous and all-encompassing the wind which blew through the skies really was. Finally, he had his flash of insight.

The wind was invisible. When it was gentle, it could be like the kiss of a lover. But when it was aroused into a vicious storm, it could split mountains and shatter stones.

“Wielding something light as though it were heavy.”

Linley hacked out with the Bloodviolet Godsword. The nearly invisible, diaphanous sword let out a thunder-like sound as out of nowhere, a tornado suddenly appeared.

“The wind-style single-combat spell, ‘Dimensional Edge’, is an extremely powerful one-on-one magical attack spell. The power of the Dimensional Edge spell is so great that it can hack apart the dimensional walls itself. Then...would it be possible to duplicate the effects of the Dimensional Edge through sword techniques?”

Linley considered this question.

The correct roads would all lead to the same destination, despite the path. The level above ‘impose’, when using the adamantine heavy sword, was achieved by Linley through using his insights regarding the Laws of the Earth.

As Linley saw it, with regards to the Bloodviolet Godsword, to surpass the ‘impose’ level, he would have to utilize his understanding of the ‘Laws of the Wind’.

Only by selecting the correct avenue of training would one not be led astray.

Right now, Linley was quietly considering which avenue of training he should embark on. But the fundamental Laws of the universe were very profound and very abstruse. To understand them was very difficult. Fortunately, Linley has exceptional elemental affinity for both wind elemental essence as well as earth elemental essence, and thus was able to reach a very high level of attunement with nature.

But despite that, without multiple years of training and time, it would be virtually impossible to make much progress.

“Swish.”

A blur slashed through the air, then landed behind Linley.

“Lord Cesar.” Linley turned his head, then immediately paid his respects.

Cesar laughed and nodded. “Where are Barker and his brothers?”

“They are training in the empty space behind their room. Lord Cesar, please follow me.” Smiling, Linley headed towards the area behind the room, but as he did, Cesar suddenly stared at Linley’s feet in astonishment.

Although on the surface, Linley appeared to be no different from normal people, but...

What sort of person was Cesar? How could he not tell?

He could clearly sense that Linley was walking in an extremely rhythmic manner, seeming to carry with each step a certain vibration. In truth, what had happened was that Linley had immersed himself in his silent training for so long that even when he walked, his steps would also embody the throbbing pulse of the earth.

“He truly is talented.” Cesar praised in his heart.

After walking for a short distance, Cesar saw Barker and his siblings. The five of them were in an area filled with countless giant boulders the size of houses, which they were using as part of their weight training. The entire area was suffused with an earth-colored layer of light.

“Haaaargh!”

The muscles on the bodies of the Barker brothers were rippling and gleaming, with the veins sticking out like snakes on their bodies, making them look extremely powerful and mighty.

“Lord Cesar.” Upon seeing Cesar, Barker and his siblings immediately stopped their training.

“You five fellows really do train hard, eh?” Cesar quirked his lips in a grin. “What sort of effectiveness are you seeing from your training?”

The fourth of the five siblings, Boone [Bu’en], said excitedly, “In the past, when we were training, we didn’t sense much improvement. But now that we are training in this Supergravity Field, both our muscles as well as our internal organs are strengthening and improving.”

The area under the effects of a Supergravity Field would see the local gravity increase dramatically.

Higher gravity could benefit the muscles, the organs, and the entire body.

“Excellent. I made a long round trip, and brought back with me the secret manual I had copied by hand all those years ago.” With a flip of his hand, a rather thin book appeared in front of Cesar.

Barker and his brothers stared at this manual, their eyes shining.

“This is the Secret Undying Manual?” The fifth brother, Gates, stared at it with wide, hungry eyes.

“Take it.” Cesar began to laugh.

The fifth brother, Gates, snatched it over, his hand moving like a blur. He immediately opened the manual and began to read, with the other four squeezed together like five giant bears, craning their necks over and staring at it with eyes as big and wide as ox-eyes.

This spectacle was actually quite funny.

“Haha.” Cesar began to laugh, while a hint of a smile was on Linley’s lips as well. Cesar looked at Linley. In a low voice, he warned, “Linley, I can tell that these five brothers are just like their ancestors. They are rather boorish and unrefined. If they are to travel alone, most likely they will be easily duped and cheated by others. I hope you can lead and guide them.”

“Lord Cesar, don’t worry.” Linley assented.

During this period of association with the five Barker brothers, Linley had discovered that these five men clearly differentiated between enmity and benevolence. They were very straightforward and didn’t play any mind games. They’d curse out whoever they wanted to curse and wouldn’t hide any of their thoughts.

Linley actually rather liked this sort of temperament. It was genuine!

“The five of them, upon training in accordance with the Secret Undying Manual, will improve at a very rapid speed. It won’t be difficult at all for them to reach the ninth rank within a few years.” Cesar sighed to himself.

Turning his head, he glanced at Linley. “This Linley is most likely worthy of my trust.”

As far as Cesar was concerned, Linley couldn’t even come close to comparing with the five Barker brothers in terms of importance. After all, these five were the descendants of the closest friend Cesar had ever made. As for Linley, he was nothing more than a sculptor whom Cesar, a statue aficionado, rather liked.

Towards Linley, he only felt appreciation.

But towards the five brothers, he felt the sort of doting love one might feel towards one’s grandchildren.

Soon after, Cesar left again. After about half a year had passed, the manor was completed, and Linley and his team took up residence within, beginning a long period of quiet training.

Aside from Cesar, perhaps the only person who knew that Linley was living there was Yale.

Yale had long ago had set up a system of sending someone each month to provide news regarding the Radiant Church, basic news regarding the Yulan continent as a whole, as well as information about Wharton.

Although they were living in this village, Linley thus was still kept very well informed about the affairs of the Yulan continent.

Within a forest on the west side of Cloudpeaks Village, Linley was training by himself.

Three years.

They had spent three full years within the quiet Cloudpeaks Village. During these three years, the Radiant Church's forces had been searching fruitlessly for them. As for Linley, he had totally immersed himself within his training, and had advanced quite rapidly as well.

The wind rose, blowing the dead leaves to the ground.

Linley raised his head to look at the sky. Very high up above him, a Bluewind Hawk was flying with wings spread. A hint of a smile appeared on Linley's lips, and he suddenly thrust his adamantine heavy sword into the air.

"Boom!"

Originating from Linley's adamantine heavy sword, a series of faint cracks in space itself could be seen as a vibrational wave burst forward up into the sky at an incredibly high speed.

In the blink of an eye, the vibrating waves had traversed nearly a thousand meters.

"Boom!"

The body of the Bluewind Hawk, a magical beast of the fifth rank, shuddered, then began to collapse from the skies.

"I've finally reached the level of the 'Hundred Layered Waves'." Linley's eyes were filled with a hint of confidence. "If today, that Stehle were to be struck by me again, he most likely wouldn't get off with just a light wound this time."

Profound Truths of the Earth – Triple Layered Waves!

Profound Truths of the Earth – Ten Layered Waves!

Profound Truths of the Earth – Hundred Layered Waves!

After spending three years, Linley had already reached an extremely high level of understanding with regards to the Profound Truths of the Earth, and his attack power was now very terrifying as well.

Within a thousand meters distance, he could kill a magical beast of the fifth rank

Most likely, even an early-stage Saint-level combatant would be hard pressed to accomplish such a task. After all, battle-qi, when being transmitted through the air, would slowly be weakened by air resistance. When the distance reached a certain length, the power of the attack would be almost negligibly weak as well.

Compared to battle-qi, these 'vibrational waves' would still be weakened when passing through the air, but much, much less than battle-qi would be.

When using the Triple Layered Waves technique in the past, Linley could only kill a magical beast of the fifth rank at a distance of roughly ten meters. Any farther away, and the waves wouldn't be powerful enough to kill fifth ranked magical beasts.

But upon reaching the Ten Layered Waves stage of the technique, Linley could kill a fifth ranked magical beast within a hundred meters.

But the Hundred Layered Waves was even more powerful. Even three thousand meters wouldn't prove a problem, much less a thousand.

This was the true ace in Linley's sleeve. Unless he was in a dangerous situation, Linley wouldn't willingly use this technique.

“But how to break past the barrier for the Profound Truths of the Wind?” With a flip of his hand, Linley returned the adamantine heavy sword to its sheath, then drew out the Bloodviolet Godsword.

Over the past three years, Linley had gained some insight regarding the fourth level of using the Bloodviolet, the Profound Truths of the Wind. But his insights were only limited to the simplest level; the ‘Rippling Wind’ technique.

“This shouldn’t be the case. Wind-style magic isn’t just fast and flexible. It should also have extremely powerful one-on-one attack abilities. How, then, can one execute the ‘Dimensional Edge’ through sword attacks?”

Linley had a certain feeling that the effects of the ‘Dimensional Edge’ spell absolutely could be displayed through the Bloodviolet Godsword. But it was as though the road to that level was covered by a dense fog, leading Linley to have no idea where he should try to make the breakthrough.

“Big brother Linley, big brother Linley!” Rebecca’s clear voice rang out from outside the forest.

Linley grabbed the Bluewind Hawk by the neck and headed out of the forest with the hawk in his hands. This hawk would serve as part of dinner.

“Big brother Linley, your letter just came.” Rebecca smiled radiantly at Linley.

“Oh?”

Each month, a new letter would come. Linley tossed the Bluewind Hawk over. “Rebecca, our dinner tonight will be this Bluewind Hawk.” As he spoke, Linley accepted the letter and tore it open.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 40, Undying Warrior Transformation

Reading the information in this letter regarding Wharton, Linley couldn't help but start to frown.

“Wharton has registered for next year's selection process to become an honorary disciple of the War God's College?” Linley was rather puzzled and also rather dissatisfied. “Why does he want to enter the War God's College? Even the personally taught disciples of the War God at most reach the Saint-level. What, a Dragonblood Warrior can't reach the Saint-level on his own?”

Linley knew very well that entering the War God's College wouldn't have much of an impact on their development.

After all, Dragonblood Warriors were absolutely guaranteed to eventually become peak-stage Saint-level combatants. The Supreme Warriors were nothing to trifle with.

As for the Deity-level...

Despite the passage of so many years since the War God O'Brien had founded the Empire, not a single one of his honorary disciples or personally taught disciples had reached the Deity-level, right? The Deity-level wasn't something that could simply be taught by a Deity-level combatant.

“How could one's understanding of the Laws and principles of the world be taught? Everyone has their own insights. The road others have taken might not be suited to one's self.”

Linley was somewhat unhappy with his younger brother's decision to register and attempt to become an honorary disciple of the War God's College.

However, his younger brother had grown up.

“I can't blame Wharton for making his own choices.” Linley continued to read. At the very end, a hint of laughter appeared on Linley's face. “Haha, so this kid, Wharton...haha...”

The letter Yale had ordered to be delivered explained in detail the reason why Wharton had registered for the chance to be selected as an honorary disciple of the War God's College. The primary reason was because of the Seventh Princess of the Empire.

“I hope that Wharton will have a perfect, unbroken love life. At the very least, it must not be like mine was.” Linley blessed his younger brother silently.

Indeed, the reason Wharton wanted to become an honorary disciple of the War God's College was because of her. Given that the master of the War God's College was the founding Emperor of the O'Brien Empire, War God O'Brien, upon entering the War God's College, it would be much easier for Wharton to wed an imperial princess.

After reading the letter, a flame emerged from Linley's hands.

“Crackle.” The letter was reduced to ash.

Alongside Rebecca, Linley made his way back to their manor.

His days of peaceful training continued. Linley continued to keep an eye out for Wharton's affairs. According to the reports in the letters, the Seventh Princess of the Empire was an extremely beautiful girl, and she was also very adorable and kind. She was also doted on by her imperial father, which was why she had many pursuers.

Several of them had higher social statuses and rankings than Wharton.

However...

The Seventh Princess of the Empire was on very good relations with Wharton. She would often go out to play and joke around with him.

The next year, the competition to join the War God's College began. This was also the fourth year for Linley and his squad here at Cloudpeak Village.

"Big brother Linley, here's your letter."

Rebecca once more delivered a letter to him. Linley immediately opened it and began to read. Based on the timing of events, this letter should have information regarding the grand competition.

Given his younger brother's ability, he should be able to succeed.

"Oh? He failed?" Reading the contents of the letter, Linley frowned.

The competition to become an honorary disciple of the War God's College had resulted in a young man named Blumer [Bu'lu'mo] capturing that position. This sort of competition wasn't the type of competition where the last man standing would be given the position.

It was a series of competitions resulting in a total of ten finalists. From within these ten finalists, either the War God himself, or one of his personally taught disciples, would select the next honorary disciple.

Wharton had indeed become one of the ten finalists, but in the end, the War God's College had selected Blumer.

"Yet another genius?" Linley was very surprised.

Blumer was currently 32 years old, yet had just entered the ninth rank as a warrior. This astonishing natural talent was indeed quite incredible.

"But in terms of talent, Wharton should still be somewhat superior to him. This year, Wharton should be 21 years old, but he has already entered the eighth rank as a warrior." Linley had learned just a month ago that Wharton had entered the eighth rank as a warrior.

A 21-year old warrior of the eighth rank was very astonishing as well.

"Hrm?" Reading Blumer's background information, something caught Linley's eye.

"Blumer's older brother is actually the Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier?" Linley was quite surprised. Olivier was that genius who, immediately upon entering the Saint-level, defeated the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon.

It wasn't impossible for an early-stage Saint-level to defeat a Saint-level who had entered the Saint-level many years ago.

What it required was a higher level of understanding and insight.

For example, Linley. Right now, his level of understanding and insight was already at the peak of the Saint-level. Only, because his physical strength and battle-qi was too low, it was impossible for him to enter the Saint-level at this time.

As soon as he reached the required amount of strength and battle-qi, he would enter the Saint-level.

This was why Linley now spent a large majority of his time training his battle-qi. He wanted to break through to the ninth rank as quickly as possible.

“I wonder how Wharton is currently feeling.” Linley wondered to himself. That buck-toothed, chubby cheeked kid from years ago was now an adult.

Linley was truly filled with love and affection towards Wharton.

“The Emperor of the O’Brien Empire, if this letter is accurate, should already know that Wharton is the descendant of the Dragonblood Warrior clan. Given Wharton’s power, he clearly is capable of Dragonforming. As a Dragonblood Warrior, the imperial clan would not be disgraced by Wharton marrying the Emperor’s daughter.”

Actually, Linley didn’t really feel much respect or fear towards the so-called royal clans or imperial clans.

The only thing he feared and respected was truly powerful experts, such as the War God, the High Priest, the King of Killers, and the two Kings of the Forest of Darkness and the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. The people who stood at the pinnacle of the world.

Understanding and insight was important. Physical strength was important as well! To Linley at his current level in particular, improving his battle-qi and physical strength was something he desperately needed.

When using the same technique of ‘wielding something light as though it was heavy’, the force of Linley’s attacks were dozens of times weaker than that of a Saint-level combatant.

The same was true for the Profound Truths of the Earth.

At this time, Linley perhaps could seriously injure a Saint-level combatant if he caught him off guard, but if a Saint-level combatant were to use the technique, he definitely could cause the opponent to instantly perish.

The three vibrational waves were the same, but the strength of the vibrations was just on totally different levels. The vibrational power unleashed by a Saint-level combatant would be ten times higher.

“The basics!”

Linley sat in the meditative position on his bed, all the muscles on his body twitching as though countless worms were crawling beneath his skin. The veins on Linley’s forehead were bulging outwards as well.

The azure-blackish battle-qi was rapidly circulating through Linley’s arteries, each time bringing with them the unique, nourishing, strengthening effects of the Dragonblood battle-qi.

Within his dantian region.

The battle-qi had already achieved a very high degree of density. That liquefied battle-qi was constantly swirling about at a slow pace in the middle of his dantian.

“Whew.”

Linley let out a long breath, and when he did, a white mist spat forth from his mouth in a line as flat as a sharp sword.

“Who knows how long it will take to advance from the peak of the eighth rank to the ninth rank.” In the past four years, Linley had managed to reach the peak-stage of the eighth rank. But as always when it came to training, the most critical juncture was also the one which took the most time.

Right now, Linley, when transformed, was still just at the peak of the ninth rank.

As soon as he broke through to the ninth rank, Linley would be an early-stage Saint-level combatant when Dragonformed.

The peak of the ninth rank to the early-stage Saint-level was a true transformation. There was an enormous difference between the two levels.

“Haha...hahahaha...” Suddenly, a bout of wild laughter erupted from outside the room. Linley stood up from his bed, puzzled. “Why are the Barker brothers so happy, this early in the morning?”

At this time, the sky was just barely lit, and the world was covered by a thick fog. Ordinary people wouldn’t even be able to see someone five meters away; all they would see was the fog.

“Big brother Barker, why are you guys ranting like this early in the morning? We sisters need our sleep!” Rebecca called out unhappily.

Linley’s vision was far stronger than that of ordinary people’s. At a glance, he could tell that the eldest of the five brothers, Barker, was so happy he couldn’t control himself.

“Big bro, why are you so happy?” The other four siblings all came out of their rooms as well.

“I succeeded. I’ve broken through to the ninth rank.” Barker excitedly said to his four brothers. “Haha, when transformed, I can finally reach the early-stage of the Saint-level.”

The Undying Warriors’ transformation was very similar to that of the Dragonblood Warriors in this respect. If in their normal, human form, they were of the ninth rank, once transformed, they would be at the Saint-level.

“Early-stage Saint-level?” Zassler, who had just walked out of his own room, was shocked as well.

Linley, the sisters, and the four brothers of Barker were both stunned as well.

Linley’s eyes were shining.

“Barker, you’ve really broken through?” Linley said with uncontrollable excitement.

Barker nodded. “Yes, Lord. I truly have broken through.” In the past, the Barker brothers all addressed Linley as ‘Lord Linley’. Now that they were in the village, everyone was pretending that Linley was a noble and the five brothers were his guards, so naturally, they continued to address Linley as ‘Lord’.

After four years, everyone had gotten used to this form of address.

After all, the five Barker brothers were very heroic, blunt figures. Their minds weren’t nearly as agile as Linley’s and Zassler’s. The decisions of this group were primarily made by Linley.

“Let’s go to the empty space in the west. Let us get a good look at your current power.” Linley immediately said.

Everyone excitedly rushed out of the manor towards the empty space in the west side. Because the sun wasn't totally up yet, most of the people in the village were still sleeping. Not a single person could be seen.

"As soon as he transforms, he'll be Saint-level. Master, how long will it take before I'll be able to break through?" The Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, said with some frustration to Linley.

Haeru had already been at the peak of the ninth rank for a long time.

"Groooooowl." Bebe growled angrily at him. "Haeru, don't think I don't understand what your sly intentions are. You have designs on that Saint-level magicite core the Boss has."

Linley laughed as he shook his head.

For a magical beast of the peak of the ninth rank to break through to the Saint-level usually required them to make the breakthrough on their own. But of course, if they were to consume a Saint-level magicite core of the same elemental type as their own, there was a very high chance that they would be able to suddenly break through.

But of course, there was a chance of failure as well.

"Groooooowl." Haeru growled at Bebe as well. "Bebe, I'm not like you. You've been growing stronger this entire time, during the past four years. But I've stopped."

Exactly what sort of magical beast Bebe was, no one knew.

But Bebe was definitely a type of magical beast whose natural talent was even more terrifyingly high than Blackcloud Panthers. Although four years ago, Bebe was roughly on par with Haeru, in truth, Bebe was still growing and developing.

After these past four years, Bebe at his current level of power could easily devastate the Blackcloud Panther.

In terms of speed or defense, Bebe was extremely terrifying.

"Most likely, even a Saint-level combatant would have to spend quite a bit of effort to kill Bebe." Linley's heart was filled with appreciation. Four years ago, Bebe's defense was already frighteningly high. Now, it was so high as to be unspeakable.

"Haeru, that Saint-level magicite core the Boss has is darkness-element, but you are dual-element, wind and darkness. If you eat it, the chance of failure is too high. It isn't worth it! I'm a pure darkness-element magical beast. When I reach the end of my development, the chances of me making a breakthrough after consuming it is much higher than yours." Bebe said arrogantly. "What, you aren't happy? You want a taste of my claws?"

Haeru let out a growl, then fell silent.

Bebe arrogantly stuck up his little head. Haeru, this extremely arrogant magical beast, had been thoroughly cowed by Bebe.

Right at this time, Barker was about to transform.

"Bebe, knock it off." Linley was focusing on Barker, who stood in front of everyone.

"Haha, everyone, watch carefully."

Barker was extremely excited. With a popping sound, the muscles on his body began to constantly crackle and pop. The muscles on Barker's body began to wildly expand, while at the same time, the color of his skin and muscles began to transform as well.

Thunderous crackles!

Barker, originally 2.2 meters tall, had now expanded in size along with his swelling muscles. In the blink of an eye, Barker had transformed into a terrifyingly large and powerful looking giant who was 3 meters tall.

Barker's entire skin had turned into a light green color.

His skin and muscles seemed like they were made from stone, and those enormous, defined muscles clearly contained an unimaginable amount of power. Just by looking at him, one could tell this. And then, atop his light green skin, a layer of white, marble-like armor suddenly began to appear, eventually covering his entire body aside from his face. Even his head was covered by a white marble helmet.

This so-called armor and helmet was grown from his very body. It was terrifyingly odd.

And then, Barker suddenly rose into the air, flying in a circle before settling down and hovering in mid-air.

"Haha, the Saint-level. This is the power of the Saint-level." Barker excitedly smashed his two gigantic fists together. When he did, the air itself rippled from the force of that blow.

This was a Saint-level Undying Warrior!

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 41, The Power of the Hundred Layered Waves

Surrounded by the foggy mist, Linley, the Arch Magus necromancer Zassler, Rebecca, Leena, Barker's four brothers, Bebe, and Haeru all stared at the Saint-level Undying Warrior in front of them with a mixture of astonishment and delight.

Those powerful, muscular arms and legs...

Just by looking at the Saint-level Undying Warrior, one could almost physically see the warrior's aura of power and might. In particular, that white, marble-like armor made Barker look as though he truly was a war machine.

Although the other four siblings were 2.2 meters tall, compared to their big brother Barker, they now seemed like under-age children. They only reached Barker's chest in height.

"The Saint-level. Big bro, how do you feel?" The eyes of Hazer, the third brother, were shining.

Standing in mid-air, the Saint-level Undying Warrior emitted a deep rumbling noise, and then allowed his voice to reverberate through the air. "The feeling...is of power. Unbelievable power. What's more, I can fly easily, as though it were a natural ability."

Most Saint-level combatants needed to reach a certain level of understanding and insight to fly.

But the Four Supreme Warriors were different. As long as they had enough power, the exalted, mysterious bloodlines of the Four Supreme Warriors would allow them to fly as though it were second nature to them.

It was similar to how some Saint-level magical beasts would immediately and naturally know how to fly upon reaching their age of adulthood and maturity.

This was an innate gift!

"Haha, second bro, third bro, fourth bro, fifth bro. Don't be too stressed out. All of you are at the peak of the eighth rank, right? With just a single extra step, you'll be at the ninth rank, and by then, after transforming, you will be like me." Barker tried to keep his sonorous voice quiet, but he couldn't help but express his excitement.

Seeing this, Linley also felt great excitement and joy on behalf of these five brothers, who were Supreme Warriors like him.

The Barker brothers had trained for much longer than Linley had. When they had been captured and then escorted by Stehle, they had already been over thirty years old. At that time, they had already entered the eighth rank for quite some time.

They were warriors of the eighth rank who had never trained using the 'Secret Undying Manual'.

As soon as they did, it was only natural that they then developed at an astonishingly fast pace. After all, the power of one's body was what determined how much battle-qi could be generated, and those powerful

bodies of theirs...the five of them had all reached the peak of the eighth rank. And today, Barker had broken through the last gate and reached the ninth rank.

An Undying Warrior of the ninth rank in human form, an early-stage Saint-level after transforming.

“Breaking through from the peak of the eighth rank to the ninth rank isn’t hard, but it isn’t easy either. I might still need several years.” The fifth brother, Gates, pursed his lips.

It was hard to say when one would break through to another level.

For example, Linley was currently at the peak of the eighth rank as well. He might break through tomorrow, or he might break through in three to four years.

Barker suddenly looked at Linley. With excitement, he said, “Lord Linley, use that ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ technique to attack me again.”

“You want to give it a try?” Linley laughed with resignation.

One of the reasons why Linley was able to make the five of them willingly address him as ‘Lord’ and accept him as their leader was because Linley had totally outclassed the five of them in terms of martial force. In recent years, the five brothers had trained in accordance with the ‘Secret Undying Manual’, and after transforming into Undying Warriors, they had sparred a few times with Linley.

Undying Warriors did indeed possess an astonishingly high defense.

But the strange vibrational attacks of the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ were able to pierce through the armor and the muscles of the Undying Warriors, suffering only a slight loss of power before attacking their internal organs.

At that time, Linley had only used his weakest ‘Triple Layered Waves’ against them, and at a reduced level of power. But despite that, the five brothers still suffered some light injuries.

“The Profound Truths of the Earth is an extremely dangerous technique. Barker, if you really want to give it a try, then it has to be like it was in the past. I’ll start at the weakest level of power, then slowly ramp it up one level at a time. I don’t dare use my most powerful attack at the very start.” Linley said sincerely.

Profound Truths of the Earth – Hundred Layered Waves.

The power of this attack was dozens of times greater than the Triple Layered Waves. According to Linley’s calculations, it shouldn’t be too difficult for him to use this attack to kill an early-stage Saint-level combatant.

“Don’t worry, Lord. Let’s do this one step at a time. I won’t try to show off too much.” Barker’s deep voice rumbled out.

“Fine, then.” Linley nodded. “You are already at the Saint-level. I’ll transform into a Dragonblood Warrior as well.” Linley removed his upper body clothes, then allowed his body to become fully covered with black draconic scales, with the sharp spikes coming out as well.

In the blink of an eye, Linley had totally transformed into his Dragonblood Warrior form.

“Each time I see his Lordship’s eyes, my heart trembles.” The fifth brother, Gates, said in a low voice. The other three nodded.

The dark golden eyes Linley had inherited from the Armored Razorback Wyrms were cold and utterly remorseless.

“Barker, first, I’ll use my fist to execute the Profound Truths of the Earth. If you can totally withstand it, then I’ll switch to using the adamantine heavy sword.” Linley said in a deep voice.

Through using his fists, he could still put the power of the Profound Truths of the Earth on full display.

Only, in terms of actual force, it would be about half of that which the adamantine heavy sword could generate.

“Alright, come. Don’t take it too easy on me.” Barker was full of excitement as well. Right now, his blue eyes had a hint of gold in them.

Launching off from the ground, Linley shot upwards like a vicious blur towards the mid-air Barker.

“Ten Layered Waves.” Linley let out a growl.

Like a thunderbolt, his right fist smashed through the air, landing directly against the white armor covering Barker’s chest. But Barker felt nothing at all as that seemingly titanic punch slammed against his body.

“Boom!” “Boom!” “Boom!”

The strange attack penetrated through his armor and his powerful muscles, then pierced through the Undying battle-qi surrounding his organs. Finally, like a warhammer, it smashed against his heart and his other organs.

His internal organs all quivered.

But then, the Undying battle-qi in Barker’s body once more covered his organs.

“Haha, I’m fine. Again.” Barker’s eyes were shining. Linley’s punch using the Ten Layered Waves had actually not been able to injure him at all. The only thing he felt was a slight tremble from his internal organs.

Linley nodded.

Indeed, if a Saint-level Undying Warrior, with their incredibly strong defense, wasn’t able to take an empty-handed Ten Layered Waves blow, then Undying Warriors wouldn’t be worthy of being praised as the Supreme Warriors with the greatest level of defense.

“Fine. I’ll begin to gradually increase my attack power.” Linley didn’t waste any more words, immediately beginning to attack.

Barker knew very well that the weak point of the Undying Warriors lay in their low speed. In truth, even if he were to engage in a genuine battle against Linley, given Linley’s superior speed, Linley could land one punch after another on him. The result wouldn’t be too different from what he was doing right now; just standing there and letting Linley hit him.

The number of vibrations each blow caused slowly began to increase.

From ten layers, to twenty layers, to thirty layers...

“His defense truly is powerful. He’s even managed to withstand ninety layers of vibrations.” Linley’s eyes were shining. He immediately called out loudly, “Barker, prepare to take my most powerful bare-handed blow!”

Barker waited for him there in mid-air.

Barker had to admit that just then, the ninety layered waves had caused him some injury. But due to the astonishing healing power of his Undying battle-qi, he had already pretty much recovered from that light injury.

“Hundred Layered Waves!”

Like a tempest, Linley shot into the air, his fist drawing closer and closer to Barker before finally smashing against his chest.

“Boom!” “Boom!” “Boom!” “Boom!”

Barker felt as though he had been smashed by an enormous meteor as both his body as well as his internal organs began to vibrate with a strength which he had never experienced before. A hundred vibrations occurred in the blink of an eye.

Barker felt his internal organs shudder, and he could already taste blood in his mouth.

He wanted to swallow it, but then another stream of blood was forced into his mouth by his organs. He could no longer repress it, and he spat out a mouthful of blood.

“Big bro!” Barker’s four brothers immediately ran over in astonishment.

“Barker.” Linley was surprised as well.

“I’m fine.” After spitting out that mouthful of blood, Barker actually felt much better. “I’m not injured too badly. My Undying battle-qi should be able to totally cure this sort of minor wound in just three days or so.”

Barker looked at Linley with admiration. “Lord, in terms of understanding and insight, you are on a much higher level than me. Although my body is more powerful than yours, I’m still unable to defeat you.”

The Linley of four years ago definitely wouldn’t have been a match for the current Barker.

But over the course of these four years, Linley had deepened his understanding of the Profound Truths of the Earth. By enhancing his original Triple Layered Waves to the current level of a Hundred Layered Waves, he had increased his attack power by several dozen times.

“If I were to use my adamantite heavy sword, the power of the Hundred Layered Waves would be doubled.” Linley said to himself. The power of the Profound Truths of the Earth, when executed by a heavy sword, was extremely great.

“If I used all of my power with the adamantite heavy sword and executed the Hundred Layered Waves attack, I could most likely heavily injure or even kill an early-stage Saint-level Undying Warrior.” Linley was now very certain.

The defensive abilities of the Undying Warriors were legendary.

If even an early-stage Saint-level Undying Warrior was unable to take this attack, how could an ordinary early-stage Saint-level combatant do so?

“Any early-stage Saint-level who encounters the Hundred Layered Waves attack will most likely die.” Linley felt extremely confident.

Raw power and level of insight were mutually supportive.

Compared to four years ago, Linley’s raw power had not increased much. But in terms of the effectiveness of his level of understanding, he had improved by dozens of times. An ordinary peak-stage combatant of the ninth rank, upon reaching the Saint-level, would generally only increase in power by around ten times or so.

“Barker.” Zassler said with a smile. “In terms of raw power, the bodies of the five of you are not one whit weaker than Linley’s. Your body, Barker, is in fact stronger than Linley’s. But in terms of insight and understanding, you are too inferior. Linley has already told you that his levels of understanding can be divided into four levels; ordinary attacks being the first, ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’ as the second, ‘impose’ as the third, and the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ as the fourth. But the five of you are still at the most basic level of using raw force. Your level of understanding and insight is far too low.”

Barker deactivated his transformation, returning to his normal appearance.

“In the past four years, Lord Linley has already taught us much. But we five brothers truly...” Barker laughed awkwardly.

“Old man, do you think we are geniuses? His Lordship is around twenty five years old, but has already reached the peak-stage of the Saint-level in terms of insight and understanding.” The fifth brother, Gates, didn’t treat Zassler with any respect at all.

Zassler glanced at Gates unhappily.

“You are physically powerful and all use heavy weapons. You should easily be able to understand the level of ‘using something heavy as though it were light’. But don’t be too impatient. As long as you focus on your training, one day, you will perhaps understand it.” Linley said encouragingly.

In truth, Linley had a large, unfair advantage.

His elemental affinity was, after all, exceptional. As a magus, he naturally was able to more easily attune with nature and commune with it. Pairing his inborn elemental affinity with his proficiency with the sword, it was very natural for him to be able to quickly deepen his level of understanding.

“Yes, Lord.” The five brothers all nodded.

The five Barker brothers all knew that right now, Linley was also at the peak of the eighth rank. As soon as he broke through to the next level, Linley would also be at the early-stage of the Saint-level in his Dragonform. Given his already-high level of understanding, by then, the difference between Linley and them would be even greater.

“We can’t allow ourselves to become a hindrance to him.” The five proud brothers all decided to work even harder from now on.

In the blink of an eye, yet another year passed.

The autumn wind was still howling drearily, the same as before.

Staring into the distance at the Barker brothers engaged in their training, Linley couldn’t help but grin. All five of the Barker brothers were physically stronger than Linley, and Linley had paid for the Dawson Conglomerate to produce weapons for them.

Five long-handled greataxes.

Those long-handled greataxes were at least two meters long, and were astonishingly thick. In addition, the axeheads were extremely large as well. The greataxes themselves were made from the finest and rarest of materials, with each long-handled greataxe weighing an astonishing 5300 pounds.

“The fifth brother, Gates, has a relatively higher talent for insight. He was the first to understand ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’. The other four have yet to grasp it.”

Although over a year had passed, aside from Barker, the others remained stuck at the peak-stage of the eighth rank and had not broken through. The only pleasant surprise had been Gates coming to understand ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’.

Zassler had spent this year in tireless training as well. This 800+ year old man had been somewhat embarrassed by the rapid increases in power by Linley and the Barker brothers, causing him to become hard working as well.

Watching the dried leaves fall from the trees, Linley suddenly felt very much at peace.

“Five years. It has been five years. I should go fulfill my end of the five year agreement as well.” Linley looked towards the northwest, in the direction of the prefectural city of Cerre.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 42, An Appointment Kept

The five year agreement. Linley still remembered his promise.

“I hope Jenne won’t be too determined.” Linley knew that even if in the end, Jenne elected to follow him, at most Linley would only be able to treat her as he did Rebecca and Leena.

Linley couldn’t reciprocate her affections.

After experiencing so much and passing one tribulation after another, the deepest part of Linley’s heart had been frozen and locked. That layer of ice covering it was very cold, very thick. To melt the hard ice surrounding Linley’s heart would be difficult. Very difficult.

But when he thought about affairs of the heart, Linley began to think about Wharton.

“According to Yale’s messengers, over this past year, Wharton and the Seventh Princess of the Empire have been quite passionate with each other. However, according to what the letter says, it won’t be easy for Wharton to successfully take the Seventh Princess as his wife.”

The Seventh Princess’s background was simply too excellent. She was virtuous, kind, beautiful, of high rank, and doted upon by her imperial father. There were too many suitors.

The only thing Linley could do was to silently bless his little brother and hope he would have a wonderful relationship.

At least, his brother couldn’t end up like him.

Half a month later.

“Lord.” The fifth brother, Gates, energetically sprinted over towards Linley, who had just completed a sculpture. With excitement, he said, “My big brother has also grasped the concept of ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’.”

“Oh?”

With a flip of his hand, Linley stored away his straight chisel. With surprise, he said, “Barker has reached the level of ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’?”

“Right. Lord, why don’t you go take a look?” Gates advised.

Linley laughed. “How about this. Gates, have everyone come to the main hall. There’s something I want to tell all of you.”

“Oh.” Seeing Linley had something important that he wished to discuss, Gates nodded.

After a while, everyone congregated within the main hall. Many of them were animatedly talking about Barker reaching the level of ‘wielding something heavy as though it were light’.

“Everyone.”

Smiling, Linley walked into the main hall. "I have an important matter I need to take care of. On this trip, I will only bring Bebe and Haeru. As for the rest of you, all you need to do is to continue to train here. If everything happens quickly, I'll be back in a few days. If I need a bit longer, I'll send someone with a message."

"Lord, you don't plan to take us along?" Gates asked loudly.

"Continue your training." Linley laughed as he glanced at Gates. "Gates, if you can reach the 'impose' level, or reach the ninth rank, I will take you as well."

Gates immediately shut his mouth. He wasn't Linley. Reaching the level of 'wielding something heavy as though it were light' was already quite difficult for him. He was still just at the basic stage of this level, and had yet to even master it.

"Enough. Tomorrow morning, I leave at dawn." Linley declared directly.

The next morning at dawn, the Barker brothers, Rebecca, Leena, and Zassler all watched as Linley, dressed in a warrior's outfit covered by a long black robe, rode off on the back of Haeru, his Blackcloud Panther, with Bebe seated next to him. The man and the two magical beasts departed from the Cloudpeaks Village.

His long black robe fluttered in the wind. Linley's weapons had all been withdrawn into his interspatial ring.

"Using the adamantine heavy sword to execute the Profound Truths of the Earth is extremely powerful; once that technique comes out, most likely the target will perish. Normally, it would be better for me to continue using the Bloodviolet Godsword."

Linley had already reached a fairly high level of proficiency in using his Profound Truths of the Earth.

But as for the Profound Truths of the Wind his Bloodviolet sword used, Linley's level of proficiency was quite low.

Linley didn't believe that using the Bloodviolet sword was necessarily weaker than using the adamantine heavy sword. After all, the forbidden wind-style spell was the single-target spell 'Dimensional Edge'. If magical techniques could create the effects of this spell, logically speaking, sword techniques should as well.

"Bebe, I've discovered that over these years, you've continued to improve. What sort of magical beast are you, exactly?" Seated astride Haeru, Linley laughed towards Bebe.

Haeru let out a growl. "Master, Bebe is a total freak. I've never seen such a freakishly powerful magical beast. Five years ago, he was about the same as me, but now, he's much more powerful. But he still hasn't reached the Saint-level yet."

If Haeru had met the three sons of Dylin, the King of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, he would know that there were other magical beasts in the world that were even more freakishly powerful than Bebe. Those three were terrifying magical beasts of the Saint-rank had easily swallowed over a hundred enormous dragons into their bellies.

"Bebe has grown somewhat stronger." Linley chuckled. "But Bebe seems to still be growing."

Linley suspected that Bebe was not fully an adult yet.

"Heh heh, that's entirely possible." Bebe narcissistically raised his little head. "When I, Bebe, reach adulthood, maybe I'll be a Saint-level magical beast."

Saint-level magical beasts such as the Bloody-eyed Maned Lion, the Savage Worldbear, the Violet-Eyed Goldfur Ape...these were magical beasts which would, as a natural part of their growth cycle, enter the Saint-level as soon as they reached full adulthood.

This was the innate gift of these Saint-level magical beasts.

“I’ve heard of Saint-level magical beasts. But is there such a thing as magical beasts which would naturally grow up to reach the Deity-level?” Linley sighed to himself. “Even if there are, I’ll wager they wouldn’t appear on planes such as the Yulan continent.”

They continued on their journey. By nightfall, Linley reached the prefectural city of Cerre.

On the streets of Cerre, there were many people mounted on magical beasts. However, most of those people were mounted on low-level or mid-level magical beasts such as Windwolves or Fanged Wolves.

When Linley rode the Blackcloud Panther on the streets, the other magical beasts all prudently retreated in terror, giving him space.

Although humans, when encountering strange magical beasts, might not be able to accurately gauge the beast’s strength, when a low level magical beast encountered a high level magical beast, they would easily be able to sense the difference in power.

“Hrm? A black panther?”

A very ordinary man in the streets of the prefectural city of Cerre saw Linley seated on his black panther, and his eyes immediately lit up. “He has a black panther, and he looks exactly the same as the picture. It must be him.”

The man immediately grew excited. He immediately ran out of the street, heading towards a small alleyway.

At the gate to the governor’s castle of the prefectural city of Cerre. As soon as Linley had seen the gate, he discovered that a large number of people were congregating around the gate, awaiting his arrival.

“Big brother Ley.”

A young man and woman called out at the same time.

Linley immediately recognized them. The girl who had grown even more mature and beautiful was Jenne, while the handsome young fellow who was half a head taller than Jenne was most likely the grown up Keane.

Keane and Jenne ran over excitedly.

The now nineteen year old Keane said loudly, “Big brother Ley, I heard from the guards a long time ago that a man riding a black panther had arrived. I immediately guessed that it must be you.”

Black panthers were extremely rare, after all. There were only two types; Blackstripe Panthers, and Blackcloud Panthers.

“Big brother Ley.” Jenne’s face was slightly flushed, and she looked expectantly at Linley.

“Let’s talk inside.” Linley said with a calm laugh.

All of them entered the castle. Since he had turned sixteen, Keane had officially taken over the management responsibilities of the city, and by now, he was a qualified city governor.

Last year, Keane had taken a beautiful wife. At the time, Keane had wanted to invite Linley, but unfortunately, he had no idea where Linley was living.

“Jenne, you’ve become a magus?” Walking in the hallway, Linley laughed as he asked her this question.

Given Linley’s spiritual energy, he could immediately sense the aura of a magus coming from Jenne. The aura wasn’t particularly strong.

“Right. A water-style magus.” Jenne’s eyes shone with excitement. “Big brother Ley, after you left, I didn’t have anything to do. Afterwards, I realized that with you being so powerful, if I couldn’t do anything and kept on being a hindrance to you, that wouldn’t be a good thing. So, I went to have my elemental affinity and my spiritual energy tested. I didn’t expect that I was suited to train in water-style magic.”

When she was young, Jenne had been constantly suppressed and held down by her aunt, and thus didn’t have the chance to train in magic at all.

Nobody had any idea that Jenne had the capability of becoming a magus.

“But my talent isn’t very high. After five years, I’m still only a magus of the third rank.” Jenne said quietly.

Generally speaking, from infancy until adulthood, one’s spiritual energy was continuously growing. But for geniuses such as Linley and Reynolds, even if they hadn’t trained in magic when they were young and only began once they reached the age of eighteen, they probably would have immediately started off with the spiritual energy of a magus of the third rank.

Eighteen years of growth, combined with five years of training. And yet, she was still only of the third rank.

Her talent could only be considered to be average, perhaps a bit higher than your ordinary magi.

“Big brother Ley, have a seat.” Keane enthusiastically invited Linley to sit in the seat of honor. “Let me make some introductions. This is my wife, Irene [Ai’lin].”

Seated next to Keane was a very beautiful young lady, who had a pair of pretty blue eyes. Right now, this young lady was looking at Linley with curiosity. When she and Keane had first begun their courtship, Keane often would talk to her about Linley.

“Big brother Ley.” Irene said courteously.

“Keane, everyone, just sit down and relax. Don’t stand on so much ceremony.” Linley said with a calm laugh.

Everyone sat down, but Keane continuously stared at Linley. Keane knew very well that the purpose of this trip had to do with that five year agreement he had made.

Five years having passed, Jenne was now twenty three. Because of training in water-style magic, Jenne’s skin was now glistening, making her even more beautiful. And the now twenty three year old Jenne now had a more womanly aura.

During these five years, Jenne had many suitors.

And not just from the prefectural city of Cerre. Whenever Jenne and Keane went to attend the yearly events of the clan at the provincial capital of Basil, there would be many people who would attempt to flirt with or make passes at Jenne.

But Jenne still refused to pay any of them any heed.

“Jenne.” Linley looked at Jenne, cutting straight to the heart of the matter. “I imagine you still remember our five year agreement. Jenne, I’ll tell you right now, in my heart, I truly can only envision you as a younger sister who needs someone to cherish her.”

Jenne’s entire body trembled, but in the next moment, she began to laugh.

Next to her, Keane and their housekeeper, Lambert, both let out a low sigh.

“Big brother Ley.” Jenne said. “I feel very fortunate to have a big brother like you. No matter what, no matter where, I’ll follow you. I just hope that you won’t discard me before I get married.”

Linley slightly trembled.

But he immediately understood that Jenne truly had made up her mind to follow him. But judging from what Jenne was saying, over the course of these five years, Jenne had already mentally prepared for what he had said today.

“Then you’ve decided to follow me and leave here?” Linley asked.

Jenne paused for a second. After all, she was very close to her brother, Keane. In her heart, she couldn’t bear to part with him either. But after taking a glance at Keane and seeing how happy and loving he was with Irene, Jenne’s worries melted away.

“I can follow you away at any time, big brother Ley. Big brother Ley, where do we go first?” Jenne asked.

“We’ll first pay a visit to a small town near the provincial capital of Basil.” Linley replied.

“The provincial capital of Basil?” Keane started, then immediately said, “Big brother Ley, our Jacques clan will organize a yearly gathering at the provincial capital of Basil each year. It happens every year on November 15th. The day will come in three days. Big brother Linley, would you be willing to let my sis go with me one more time? It’s in the same direction anyhow.”

Keane looked expectantly at Linley.

Keane really couldn’t bear to be parted from his sister. He knew that Linley roamed the world. Once his sister left with Linley, who knew how long it would be before the two would meet again?

Having grown up alongside his big sister, their affection was naturally very deep.

Linley looked at Keane, then looked at Jenne. Finally, he nodded. “Fine. We’ll go to the provincial capital of Basil together. After you finish attending your clan’s annual gathering, Jenne will leave with me.”

“Thank you.” Keane said gratefully.

While Linley took up residence for a few days within the prefectural city’s castle, the Radiant Church’s forces that were hidden within the prefectural city of Cerre were very excited.

“That Linley actually came to the prefectural city of Cerre. This is wonderful.” A white haired man said, his face covered with excitement. “Five years, five full years. We’ve finally found Linley.”

The Radiant Church had been searching fruitlessly for Linley for five years. Sadly, due to their lack of manpower within the O’Brien Empire, their forces were primarily concentrated in places such as prefectural cities. Naturally, they wouldn’t be able to discover Linley, who was hiding within a countryside village.

However, in this prefectural city of Cerre, the place where Linley had once stayed for quite some time, the Radiant Church had a good amount of people present.

“Hurry and send a message to Lady Lyndin in the countryside. Tell her that Linley has arrived at the prefectural city of Cerre.” The white robed man immediately instructed his subordinates.

Lyndin and the other five Angels, upon arriving at the O’Brien Empire, had searched everywhere for Linley for two full years, but had found nothing. In the end, with no other choices, they had settled into a small town near the prefectural city of Cerre, ready to act at a moment’s notice.

As soon as they received any news, they would immediately head out.

They would kill Linley no matter what the cost, even if it meant they would have to die with him. This was their fate as Angels.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 43, The Gathering in Basil

That night, Linley had dinner at the main hall of the governor's castle.

“Keane, Jenne. Come outside a moment.” After finishing dinner, Linley called out to them, then walked out of the main hall to the quiet rear gardens.

Keane and Jenne exchanged glances, then followed Linley to the gardens as well.

The gardens at night were very peaceful and quiet. Looking at Jenne and Keane, Linley smiled. “Jenne, Keane, there's something I must inform you of.”

Keane and Jenne stared at Linley, puzzled.

“The Radiant Church and I have a deep hatred between us. We will not rest until one or the other is destroyed.”

These words from Linley immediately stunned Jenne and Keane. They knew that Linley was no ordinary man, but they had no idea that he was diametrically opposed to the Radiant Church.

The Radiant Church was, without question, an enormous entity.

Lowering his voice, Linley said, “Five years ago, when I fought with the Radiant Church, it most likely resulted in them becoming aware that I am in the O'Brien Empire. Five years ago, the forces of the Radiant Church became aware of Haeru's existence. I believe that just based on this alone, they should have discovered how I had followed the two of you to the prefectural city of Cerre.”

Many people knew that back then, a mysterious expert with a black panther companion had protected Keane and Jenne on their journey to Cerre, allowing Keane to assume the position of city governor.

This wasn't a secret. It wouldn't be strange at all for the Radiant Church to find out about this.

“I suspect that the Radiant Church has definitely hidden quite a few people within the prefectural city of Cerre.” Linley said calmly.

From the moment he had decided to come to the prefectural city of Cerre, Linley had already made certain plans.

That Stehle had exchanged blows with him before. After that fight, the Radiant Church would certainly have realized how dangerous Linley was to them. If they didn't send people immediately to kill him as soon as possible, then the Radiant Church really would be a pack of fools.

“Then what should we do?” Keane and Jenne were both rather bewildered.

“Jenne, first of all, let me ask you. Do you still want to follow me?” Linley stared at Jenne.

Jenne nodded without any hesitation.

Linley nodded slightly. "I'm afraid that within your castle, the Radiant Church has spies here as well. That's what I want to let you know...that I plan to leave the prefectural city of Cerre tonight."

"What?" Jenne looked at Linley in astonishment. "Big brother Ley, you plan to leave by yourself?"

"Don't worry. I'll just head out slightly before you do. I'll head to the provincial capital of Basil first. I'll take up residence in the eastern side of the city's Nile [Nai'er] Hotel. When the time comes, you can find me there." Linley was very confident in his ability to deal with the Radiant Church's men.

However, he couldn't take Jenne and Keane along with him.

If he brought such a large group of people, he would be as good as harming Jenne and Keane.

"The Nile Hotel of the eastern city. This is a very famous hotel. I know where it is." Keane nodded. Over these five years, he had paid quite a few visits to the provincial capital.

Linley had made these plans long ago.

Right now, whether or not he killed the Radiant Church's forces wasn't important. After all, killing those people didn't make a huge difference to the Radiant Church.

If he encountered them, he would kill them. If he didn't, then forget it.

As for Jenne, by the time they reunited with the five Barker brothers and Zassler, Linley would no longer be concerned about any schemes the Radiant Church might have to play.

"Then I'll leave now." Linley laughed.

"Immediately?" Jenne and Keane were startled.

"Immediately. That way, the Radiant Church's men wouldn't have any idea." Linley chuckled, then transformed into a black blur, flying through the air and disappearing from the rear gardens.

At the same moment, the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, as well Bebe also departed at high speed.

Three black blurs flashed over the prefectural city of Cerre's twenty meter tall walls, easily crossing over to the other side. Although the city walls were useful against ordinary combatants, to experts on Linley's current level, they were nothing more than a fairly high door stop.

Riding on Haeru's back, the night wind howled past Linley.

"I've discovered that I rather like the feeling of travelling by night." Feeling the cool wind blow against his face, Linley felt very much refreshed.

The light of the moon seemed to make the world covered by a layer of thin gauze, making everything seem so dreamlike.

This night, there were people riding on horses at high speed heading to other places as well. These were the people who were rushing towards Lyndin to give her the good news. However, there was a distance of over a hundred kilometers from the prefectural city of Cerre to the town Lyndin was staying in.

Linley had only arrived in the prefectural city of Cerre at nightfall. The supervisor for the prefectural city of Cerre only received the news at around 6 o'clock at night. By the time he sent someone out, it was already 7 o'clock.

At around 8 o'clock at night, Linley had left the prefectural city of Cerre.

At this time, that messenger was still on the road. By around 9 o'clock, the messenger finally managed to arrive at the town where Lyndin and the others were staying. The town was lit by fires. The poor man who had been blown on by the cold wind of November finally felt a hint of warmth.

"Lord Lyndin." The messenger man arrived at Lyndin's residence. Seeing Lyndin at the doorway, he immediately jumped off his horse. "Lord Lyndin, something important has happened. We've already discovered that Linley has arrived at the prefectural city of Cerre."

The eyes of Lyndin, who had been standing there coldly, suddenly lit up.

"Linley?" Lyndin was both shocked as well as overjoyed.

She had waited for five full years, to the point of being numb. And then tonight, this report had come out of nowhere.

"Syke [Sai'ke], Syke! All of you, come out." Lyndin's cold voice rang out a few times, and the other five Angels immediately rushed over.

These six Angels were all wearing human bodies, and thus their power was limited to that of a warrior of the ninth rank.

But their essence was still that of the Angels.

They would definitely obey orders. For the sake of the glory of the Lord, they would be willing to sacrifice their lives at any time.

Upon hearing that there was news of Linley's return to the prefectural city of Cerre, the other five Angels grew excited as well. Their mission was to kill Linley.

"Let's go, we head out immediately." Lyndin immediately ordered.

"Yes." The other five didn't hesitate at all.

Lyndin and the others didn't bother about the messenger. The six of them, relying on their legs, immediately began racing towards the direction of the prefectural city of Cerre. As combatants of the ninth rank, without question, the speed they could reach was much faster than that of horses.

The next morning.

Within a very ordinary manor in the prefectural city of Cerre. The previous night, Lyndin and her people had taken up residence here upon reaching the prefectural city of Cerre.

"What? Linley disappeared?" Lyndin stared coldly at the white-robed man in front of her.

The white-robed man immediately said, "Lord Lyndin, the people we stationed within the city governor's castle didn't know either. They only found out this morning that Linley and his two magical beasts disappeared. Most likely, they've left the prefectural city of Cerre."

"Bam!"

Lyndin angrily smashed a fist against the stone desk in front of her, smashing it into tiny pieces. The other five Angels were extremely angry as well.

The six of them had spent over five years here. They had just received word of Linley's arrival, but then in the blink of an eye, he had disappeared again.

The white-robed man was somewhat nervous now. He knew that the six people in front of him were very powerful. Even the Northwest Administrative Province's supervisor had to obey the orders of these six people.

However, the white robed man didn't know that these six were actually angels.

Only in the moments before the deaths, when Lyndin and the others chose to go all out, would their true power as Angels be put on display.

"Investigate. Go investigate. Find out where Linley has gone. Also...activate every resource we have in the entire Northwest Administrative Province. We must find Linley. Linley must be somewhere within the Northwest Administrative Province." Lyndin said in a cold, deadly voice.

"Yes." The white-robed man immediately assented.

They hadn't been able to find Linley for five years. Lyndin had even begun to worry if Linley had perhaps left the O'Brien Empire. After all, given they had found no trace of him, there was no way they could be certain as to where he actually was.

But at least they now knew for sure that Linley was in the Northwest Administrative Province.

Just as Lyndin was feeling furious at her helplessness on the third morning, they received word from the provincial capital of Basil.

"Linley has appeared within the provincial capital of Basil."

As soon as they received this news, Lyndin's other colleagues grew excited.

"Lord, shall we head out now?" The five looked at Lyndin expectantly. Lyndin was the captain of their squad. In fact, amongst the Descended Angels, Lyndin could be considered a fairly famous person.

The Angels that would descend into bodies that could only support the ninth rank were almost all Two-Winged Angels. Only three of them were Cherubim, Four-Winged Angels, and of the three, Lyndin was the only female one.

"That McKenzie is in the provincial capital."

Lyndin frowned. "McKenzie has reached the Saint-level nearly sixty years ago. From our reports, his power can be considered a mid-stage Saint-level. If he were to interfere, things would become complicated."

"Lord, if we were to go all out, killing McKenzie shouldn't be too hard." Another nearby Angel, the one known as Syke, spoke out.

"Right. When going all out, we can allow our bodies to collapse and utilize all of our true power. The five of us are all Two-Winged Angels, while you, Lord, are a Cherub. Although it will only be for a short period of time, it should be enough to kill Linley.

Hearing her subordinates words, Lyndin hesitated.

Indeed. If Angels were to ignore their physical collapse, they could indeed use all of their real power for a short period of time. But most likely, after just two or three attacks, their bodies would have turned to ash.

When a Cherub and five Two-Winged Angels used the Angel Battle Formation and allowed their bodies to collapse from using their full power, even a mid-stage Saint-level combatant might die in their hands.

“No rush.” Lyndin said calmly. “Everyone, calm down. Going all out is our last resort. After all, pre-transformation, Linley isn’t that impressive. We can instead find an opportunity where Linley is in his human form and directly kill him.”

“Lord, then your intention is to...” The five looked at Lyndin.

“That Linley doesn’t recognize the six of us.” A hint of a cruel smile was on Lyndin’s face.

That day, Lyndin’s group, led by the white-robed man, rode fine horses out of the prefectural city of Cerre.

“Lord, the military carriage up ahead belongs to the soldiers of the city governor of Cerre.” The white-robed man reported in a quiet voice to Lyndin and the others as soon as he saw them.

“Oh? Is it Jenne and Keane?” Lyndin glanced at the distant caravan.

Jenne and Keane’s relationship with Linley was something that Lyndin knew quite a bit about.

“Have your subordinates been mixed into their caravan?” Lyndin lowered her voice.

“Yes, Lord.” The white-robed man nodded. Smiling, Lyndin said, “That’s fine. For now, we don’t need to pay them any attention.

Lyndin’s group clearly travelled at a much faster pace than Keane and Jenne’s group. In the blink of an eye, they passed them by. The reason Keane and Jenne were making this trip out to the prefectural city of Basil was because they needed to attend the annual dinner party.

Lyndin’s team and Jenne’s caravan were both headed towards the provincial capital of Basil. As for Linley, quite some time ago, he had settled down in the hotel in the east side of the city.

There was a small manor located right off behind the hotel. Linley was staying there.

“I came to the provincial capital of Basil in such grand fashion. Most likely, the Radiant Church’s men recognized me. I wonder who the Radiant Church will send out next time?”

Linley wasn’t worried in the slightest. He was actually quite eager.

“I haven’t encountered anyone who could fight me head on yet, or force me to use the ‘Hundred Layered Waves’ level of the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth.’

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 44, Neighbors

The provincial capital of Basil was the base of operations for the ancient Jacques clan, here in the Northwest Administrative Province. Here in the Northwest Administrative Province, the Jacques clan could be considered the local kings. During their annual clan gathering, all of the various branches of the clan would hurry over to the provincial capital.

In the northeast part of the provincial capital, there was an extremely large and ancient castle. This was the headquarters of the Jacques clan.

Yulan calendar, year 10008. November 14th. This was a day when the Jacques clan's castle would always be decorated and brightly lit. The number of guards at the gate were tripled as well, compared to the past. In addition, many branch members of the clan were passing through the gates this day, arriving from all over the world.

"Sis, the clan's castle is much larger than ours, at least ten times larger." Keane peered through his carriage's cloth door while sighing in amazement.

This carriage contained three people. Keane, Irene, and Jenne.

Jenne also stared through the door. Nodding, she said, "The clan clearly has far more experts than us as well. Only, I wonder if Great-Grandfather will be there as well."

The Great-Grandfather which Jenne spoke of was McKenzie.

Each year, at the annual gathering, McKenzie sometimes attended but sometimes did not. However, two years ago, McKenzie did show himself once. That sighting had satisfied Jenne and Keane's desire to see the hero whom everyone in the clan worshipped.

"It is very possible. Irene has never seen Great-Grandfather." Keane held his wife's hands.

The caravan quickly arrived at the castle gates. It came to a halt. Jenne, Keane, and Irene all knew the rules. They got off the carriage.

"Jenne!" A happy, teasing voice rang out.

Immediately upon hearing this voice, Jenne frowned, but then she squeezed out a smile. She turned her head and looked towards a young man with gleaming hair. "Cousin Albert [Ai'bo'te]."

"Cousin Albert." Keane and Irene also said courteously.

Albert looked like someone who was full of himself. Being educated since he was young had given him the airs of an ancient, noble clan, but just by looking at his eyes and his face, anyone could tell that this man was an empty-headed lecher.

But Albert was the eldest son of the current clan leader of the Jacques clan, and was the successor to the position as well.

The future clan leader of the Jacques clan. Who would dare look down at Albert, given his status?

“Jenne, you are growing more beautiful by the year. Keane, Irene, don’t just stand there like idiots, come in.” Albert warmly escorted Jenne and the others into the castle.

Because the family gathering was on November 15th, quite a few people arrived on the 14th. The night of the 14th, the castle of the Jacques clan was extremely lively.

“Big sis, feeling frustrated over Albert again?”

Keane walked into Jenne’s room. Seeing Jenne standing at the window and sighing, he immediately could guess at what Jenne was thinking about.

Jenne turned her head to glance at her younger brother. Frowning, she said, “That Albert doesn’t have any good intentions. Each time at our clan gathering, he’ll come bother me. These days never pass by easily.”

“Sis.” Keane took his sister by the hand. Apologetically, he said, “I know that the only reason you didn’t go with big brother Ley was because you wanted to spend a few more days with me.”

“Keane.” Jenne affectionately patted Keane on the head. “Keane, you are even taller than me now.”

Keane lowered his head silently.

Jenne had taken care of Keane since they were young. Ever since they had arrived in the Holy Union, their mother had been severely ill, and so Jenne had taken care of Keane like a mother would have.

The affection between these two siblings was very deep.

“Jenne, Cousin Jenne.” Albert’s voice rang out again.

Jenne and Keane both frowned, no trace of enjoyment on their faces now. This Albert really was as annoying and stifling as a boa constrictor.

In the blink of an eye, Albert had arrived at the doorway.

“Jenne. Oh, Keane, you are here also.” Albert beamed. “Jenne, we’re organizing a small banquet in the main hall. Jenne, let’s go together. I’ve arranged for some people to prepare several beautiful evening gowns for you.”

Jenne shook her head. “No need. I’m feeling a bit dizzy and am a bit unwell.”

“Why would you be feeling unwell? Let me take a look.” Albert actually stepped forward, intending to touch Jenne by her forehead. Jenne immediately took two steps back.

Keane snickered from the side, “Cousin Albert, my sister isn’t feeling well. Let her have a good rest.”

Albert stood there for a moment, then laughed and nodded. “Fine.” He then stared at Keane. “Keane, come with me for a moment. Cousin Jenne, have a good rest. If there is anything you need, just let the servants know.” He gave Keane a meaningful look.

Keane nodded, then followed Albert out.

Within the flower garden.

Albert and Keane were walking together. Albert was silent, and Keane said nothing either.

After a long time...

“Keane, how does it feel to be the governor of a prefectural city?” Albert suddenly asked.

Keane was startled. Slowly, he said, “Pretty good.”

Albert laughed and nodded. “Of course it’s good. You govern millions of people, Keane. You must understand that the entire Northwest Administrative Province has only ten prefectural cities. Positions like the city governorship are highly sought after, and many people keep their eyes on those positions. After all, our Jacques clan is a large clan.”

As though he understood something, Keane nodded.

The Jacques clan was continuously starting new branches. Naturally, each generation was more numerous than the last. In the past, the reason why Keane’s father, Count Wade, had been lucky enough to receive the governorship was because he was on very close terms with the previous clan leader.

In truth, the various city governorships were totally all controlled and decided upon by the clan leader of the Jacques clan.

After all, the Jacques clan had sole authority over the management of the Northwest Administrative Province.

“Keane, you should know that many of my younger siblings have grown up now, such as my own third brother. Right now, he’s only a major in the army. Many of these people would very much like to become the governor of a prefectural city.” Albert looked at Keane with an expression that both was and wasn’t a smile.

Keane knew what Albert was hinting at.

“And not just my siblings. My uncles as well. In the past, they weren’t able to overcome your father, but they’ve never given up.”

Albert looked at Keane. “Keane, I have a very good impression of you. But you must understand that to get something, you have to give something.”

Keane was silent.

“Keane, you have taken the city governorship, yes, but I, the future clan leader, can make you lose it as well.” Albert saw that Keane was silent, and began to speak more coldly.

“Cousin Albert, go ahead and state your desires.” Keane forced a smile to his face.

Albert laughed. “Haha, you are my cousin. Of course I won’t force you to do anything. I just hope that we can further deepen our relationship. For example, you can have your big sister marry me. What do you think?”

Keane was filled with rage.

He knew Albert’s intentions long ago. Such a gentle, beautiful, virtuous woman such as Jenne, especially after beginning to train in water-style magic, was a very mesmerizing, refined lady.

Albert had been lusting after her this entire time.

But Albert was already thirty years old and had three wives. If Keane’s sister were to marry him, she would be nothing more than a concubine.

What's more, his sister was going to follow Linley.

"Cousin Albert, I've told you in the past that my sister already has someone she likes." Keane said helplessly.

"What a joke." Albert sneered. "Keane, if your sister has someone she likes, why hasn't she gotten married yet? And even if she likes someone, we can just go ahead and kill him."

Albert had desired Jenne for quite some time now. Not only was she beautiful, she was a magus. After a person trained in magic, their longevity would be extended. Most likely, even when she was sixty or seventy, Jenne would look like a thirty year old lady. Albert naturally desired a wife like this.

"You can't kill him. The person my sister likes is an expert of the ninth rank." Keane made up his mind.

"A combatant of the ninth rank?" Albert frowned.

This was troublesome. If he were the current clan leader, he could use the powerful soldiers of the clan to go kill that expert of the ninth rank. But he was only a successor. The people at his disposal were quite limited, and they weren't very powerful either.

"Keane, you'd best not be lying to me." Albert stared coldly at Keane.

Keane bowed slightly. "Cousin Albert, I'm definitely not lying. My sister likes him. There's nothing I can do about that. Cousin Albert, I won't disturb you any further. I bid you farewell."

Albert let out a cold snort, staring at Keane as he left.

"Five years." Albert stared in the direction of Jenne's room. "This time, I definitely cannot let Jenne slip away again. So what if he is an expert of the ninth rank? Does he dare come and make trouble for the Jacques clan?" A fierce, wolf-like look was in Albert's eyes.

On the 15th, Linley had headed to the headquarters of the Dawson Conglomerate early in the morning. Using his medallion showing that he was an elder, he sent some people to Cloudpeaks Village to inform Zassler and the others that he was going to be delayed.

And then, Linley quietly stayed in the Nile Hotel.

There were over ten manors behind the Nile Hotel, all of which were tall and well made. Linley was residing in one of them.

Within his courtyard, Linley finished carving a sculpture, and then began to wave his adamantine heavy sword about as he pleased.

Bebe and Haeru both lazily rested on the ground.

After training with the sword for some time, Linley came to a halt, a sudden thought having come to mind. "It has been a year since I reached the peak of the eighth rank. In this past month, I've always had this feeling that I'm about to break through, but for some reason, there's just some tiny piece missing."

To an ordinary person, breaking through from the peak of the eighth rank to the ninth rank wasn't a big deal.

But for Supreme Warriors, the difference between the two was extremely great. Upon entering the ninth rank, Linley in Dragonform would be at the Saint-level.

“I can’t be too hasty. My speed of training is already very fast.” Linley was still fairly calm. Staring towards the south, Linley once again began to think about his younger brother, Wharton. “When I reach the ninth rank, I’ll head towards the imperial capital and meet with my younger brother. It has been a long, long time since I’ve seen Wharton.”

Ever since Wharton had left home when he was six and headed to the O’Brien Empire along with Housekeeper Hiri, the two brothers had never met again.

And now, Wharton was twenty two years old. In another month, he would be twenty three.

“Hrm?” Linley suddenly turned and stared at the courtyard walls.

The various manors operated by the hotel were all quite close to each other, with each plot of land divided into two manors. At this time, in the manor adjoining Linley’s, the person who was renting that manor had climbed over the wall and was peeking in this direction.

This guest was an extremely adorable, agile young lady. Her guileless eyes were staring in Linley’s direction, but they were locked on the Blackcloud Panther on the ground.

“Wow, what a huge panther.” The young lady very agilely hopped over the wall, and then jogged towards Haeru.

“Don’t touch him.” Linley immediately shouted.

The young lady came to a halt, smiling and laughing at Linley. “Big brother, I’ve never seen such an adorable, large black panther. Can I please touch him?”

This young lady had a head full of silver hair, and her eyes were very intelligent. She had a playful smile on her face, but she was dressed in the garb of a female warrior.

Linley took a sizing look at this silver-haired girl.

A warrior’s power was hard to gauge just by looking at them, but Linley could tell from this girl’s aura that she was at least a warrior of the seventh rank, or perhaps even higher.

“Haeru doesn’t like being touched by others.” Linley said calmly.

The silver-haired girl couldn’t help but pout, scrunching her nose up as she frowned. “Hmph, I don’t believe you. My teacher’s magical beasts often let me touch them.” The silver-haired girl ran directly towards Haeru.

“Groooooowl.” Haeru suddenly rose to his feet, baring his sharp fangs as he stared coldly at the silver-haired girl.

The silver-haired girl was immediately frightened, and she stumbled back two steps.

“I told you. Haeru doesn’t like being touched. Enough, you can go back to your own place now.” Linley directly asked her to leave.

The silver-haired girl smiled bewitchingly at Linley. “My master told me that panther-type magical beasts are very formidable. Then big brother, you must be very powerful as well. Can I spar with you?”

“Spar?” Linley disliked his life being interrupted by others.

“Let me introduce myself first. My name is Danlan [Dan’lan].” The silver-haired girl said with an adorable smile.

“You can call me Ley. But I don’t have any time for you. You can go back now.” Linley still spoke coldly and calmly. For a young girl to be at least a warrior of the seventh rank...she wasn’t as simple as she appeared.

The silver-haired girl pouted helplessly. “Oh. Got it.” And then she turned and left, although her heart was filled with frustration. “This Linley really is a cold fellow. Getting close to him will be difficult. But I won’t give up so easily either. If I can kill him easily, I will.”

This silver-haired girl was Lyndin.

But in terms of temperament, Lyndin had changed dramatically. In the past, she was an ice-cold Angel. But now, she had become adorable and lively. One had to admit that her acting skills were formidable.

“Oh, big brother Ley, you are a sculptor?” Lyndin looked at the sculpture Linley had just completed and immediately ran over in excitement. Staring at it, she said happily, “My teacher also likes sculptures, but he doesn’t know how to carve himself.” As she spoke, Lyndin carefully inspected the sculpture with great curiosity.

Linley frowned.

This silver-haired girl was really annoying!

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 45, Vicious Acts

This sculpture was one which Linley had just finished not too long ago. Given Linley's current skill, his stonesculpting was at an extremely high level as well. This silver-haired young lady carefully examined the sculpture from every angle.

“Wonderful. Just wonderful.”

After inspecting the sculpture with great care for a while, she turned her head to look at Linley. “Big brother Ley, I sense that this sculpture of yours is better than those of my master's, but I don't know exactly how to describe it.”

Despite such an adorable girl looking at him like this, Linley only felt irritated.

“Miss Danlan, I need to train.” Linley said tactfully.

The silver-haired girl nodded. “Okay, I'll leave right away.” As soon as she said these words, Linley let out a sigh of relief. But then the silver-haired girl continued, “However, big brother Ley, after you finish training, you need to teach me how to stone sculpt.”

Linley hardened his face. “Stone sculpting is one of the top tier artistic forms. How can I so easily transmit its secrets to others?”

Indeed, most master-level sculptors would not easily accept disciples.

“Oh.” The silver-haired girl lowered her head in disappointment, beginning to walk to the nearby wall. And then, with an easy leap, she jumped to the other side.

“She's finally gone.” Linley let out a long sigh.

But then, the silver-haired girl's head popped out from over the wall. “Big brother Ley, have a good training session. After you are done, I'll come and find you.” After speaking, she disappeared again.

Lyndin returned to her own bedroom. Sitting down on a chair, her face returned to its usual coldness, and her eyes were as icy and merciless as ever. If Linley saw her, he wouldn't be able to believe that someone was able to act so well.

“This Linley is suspicious of everyone, and won't let anyone easily get close to him. This is rather troublesome.”

As a Descended Angel, Lyndin actually truly did not wish for her and the other five Angels to die alongside Linley.

However, as an Angel, she could not disobey orders.

One step at a time.

If she could easily kill Linley somehow, wouldn't that be better than sacrificing her life?

“Given the amount of care Linley has shown towards Jenne and Keane, it makes no sense that he would be so suspicious towards me.” Lyndin had come up with this plan after learning about how Linley had treated Jenne and Keane.

As long as Lyndin could get into close physical range with Linley, given her power as a combatant of the ninth rank, she could suddenly ambush him from close range in his human form. She had a 90%+ chance to kill him in that sort of situation.

“Perhaps it was because he sensed my power.” Lyndin shook her head. “This Linley has no sense of curiosity. I mentioned my ‘master’ several times, but he still didn’t ask me who my master is.”

Lyndin actually had prepared an entire chain of lines to fool Linley.

Although Lyndin appeared very young, in reality, her actual age was most likely far greater than that of Doehring Cowart. Only, the ten thousand years she had spent in the divine realm of the Radiant Sovereign hadn’t been as impactful to her as the decades she had spent here.

.....

“From her personality and her attitude, that silver-haired girl seems like an unreasonable little princess.” Linley frowned. “But her power...”

In truth, Linley was continuously wary of the Radiant Church’s forces.

As far as Linley was concerned, the Radiant Church’s forces should have already located him here by now. And now, all of a sudden, a young female warrior of the seventh rank appeared? Even if she appeared to be lively and cute, Linley wouldn’t easily trust her.

Before he trusted someone, he would take their strength into consideration.

If she had been a weak little girl who didn’t have the strength to kill a chicken, Linley’s attitude probably would have been much better. After all, even if you gave such a girl a weapon, she wouldn’t be able to hurt him at all. But this young lady was different.

If she were to suddenly attack him from a near distance, it would be very possible for her to heavily injure or kill him.

“Could it be that the assassin the Radiant Church has sent after me this time is this young lady?” But thinking back to the innocent, pure look in the silver-haired girl’s eyes, Linley found it rather hard to believe.

That night.

The silver-haired girl came again, but this time, she came pushing a hotel food cart from the front gate.

“Big brother Ley, I took the place of the servant in delivering dinner for you.” Lyndin’s clear voice rang out. Her face was covered with smiles, but Linley, looking at her, only felt a headache coming.

“You again?”

“What, is there a problem?” Lyndin pouted, then giggled, “Big brother Ley, I brought you dinner, so you teach me stone sculpting, okay?”

“No.” Linley refused.

“Stingy.” Lyndin wrinkled her nose. “When I cook for my teacher, my teacher will do anything I ask him to. You are a stingy fellow.”

“Your teacher is your teacher, I am not.” Linley simply wouldn’t agree.

This stranger was at least of the seventh rank, and perhaps even higher. Linley would not permit this female warrior to draw close to him, while teaching someone how to stone sculpt would definitely require them to be in close physical contact.

After all, this period of time was the period when he was expecting the Radiant Church to act against him.

“Remember. I don’t want you delivering my dinner.” Linley said coldly.

Lyndin’s face changed, and she glared angrily at Linley. “You bastard. You don’t know when someone is being good to you. I’ll definitely go tell my master. He’ll come over here and kill you.”

“Kill me?” Linley looked at the angry expression the girl’s face.

“Of course. My master is very powerful.” The silver-haired girl said arrogantly.

“Who is this oh-so-powerful master of yours?” Linley asked.

The silver-haired girl said arrogantly, “I’ll tell you. The name of my master is Haydson [Hei’dē’sen].”

“The Monolithic Sword Saint, Haydson?” Linley was startled.

In the entire O’Brien Empire, if the War God was considered the number one expert, then without question, the second highest expert would be the Monolithic Sword Saint, Haydson. This Monolithic Sword Saint had been at the peak-stage of the Saint-level for many years now, and he had never lost a single duel against any Saint-level experts.

He was flawless in terms of both offense and defense.

In addition, he was a very cold and remote person. Virtually nothing was capable of impeding his developments. A flawless, perfect Saint-level expert who towered above all others, his very perfect was the reason why others dubbed him the ‘Monolithic Sword Saint’.

“So now you know that you should be afraid?” The silver-haired girl laughed arrogantly. “But don’t worry. So long as you teach me how to stone sculpt, I won’t tell my teacher.”

“No wonder.” Linley looked at the silver-haired girl. “What rank are you currently at?”

“The eighth rank already.” The silver-haired girl said proudly. “What do you think? The entire Empire doesn’t have many experts of the eighth rank who are younger than me.”

Linley glanced at the silver-haired girl. “Miss Danlan, you can go back and tell your teacher that I am unwilling to teach you stone sculpting. I want to see if he will come over and kill me.”

The silver-haired girl started, and then her attitude softened. Begging, she said, “Big brother Ley, I’m begging you, just teach me, okay?” As she spoke, she walked closer to Linley.

Linley directly took three steps back, retreating into his main hall.

“Miss Danlan, I need to rest now. You should go back.” Linley shut the door to his manor.

“Hrmph.”

The silver-haired girl let out a snort, then left.

The next two days, the silver-haired girl would try all sorts of things; she would buy beautiful clothes to bring to Linley as a gift, or pretend to be very pitiable and just watch Linley. It was as though she absolutely refused to accept the fact that Linley wouldn't teach her how to stone sculpt.

The fourth day.

This morning, Lyndin came to Linley's courtyard once more, as she had every day past.

“Big brother Ley, I'm leaving now.” Lyndin said in a somewhat lost voice.

Linley glanced at the silver-haired girl with some surprise. These past three days, Linley had been tormented by this girl to the point of getting a headache whenever he saw her. What's more, Linley was still uncertain as to who this girl really was.

Someone belonging to the Radiant Church?

Or the disciple of the Monolithic Sword Saint?

But the longer he had interacted with Lyndin, the more Linley came to feel that this silver-haired girl really was the playful, active type. He didn't really think she belonged to the Radiant Church.

“If she is an assassin of the Radiant Church, then I am truly in awe of her acting abilities.” Linley secretly said to himself.

Lyndin glanced at Linley helplessly. “Big brother Ley, I've always worshipped my master, and my master also likes sculpture. I really wanted to carve a good sculpture for him, but you aren't willing to teach me.”

“It is useless if you do not have enough time and not enough talent.” Linley shook his head.

Lyndin's eyes lit up. She quickly said, “I have both time and talent.”

“Are you an earth-style magus?” Linley suddenly asked.

“No.” Lyndin shook her head, then asked questioningly, “What does this have to do with being an earth-style magus?”

Linley shook his head. “If you are not an earth-style magus, that means you do not have the talent necessary to learn stone sculpting from me.” Linley was telling the truth. The Straight Chisel School of sculpting required the sculptor to be an earth-style magus.

“You are just making that up.” Lyndin took a step forward, pointing at Linley with a finger. “I've never heard anyone say that stone sculpting required one to be an earth-style magus.”

“There's many things you don't know.” Linley laughed calmly.

Right now, Lyndin was roughly two meters away from Linley. Lyndin was calculating to herself, “Two meters distance. In his normal human form, I am more powerful than Linley. I should have the chance to kill him.”

Originally, Lyndin had wanted for the two of them to be in even closer proximity before making her move.

But Linley didn't give her the chance.

"Big brother Ley, I know that you are lying. Big brother Ley, I just want to ask you one last time. Are you willing to teach me stone sculpting?" Lyndin looked at Linley with hopeful eyes.

Linley shook his head.

"Oh." Lyndin lowered her head despondently.

But right at this moment, Lyndin suddenly charged at Linley, moving as fast as lightning, while from within Lyndin's right hand, a dagger appeared.

Two meters. They were too close.

But then, a strange violet light flashed.

Lyndin only felt as though that violet sword flash flickered everywhere, changing positions constantly. It somehow wrapped around her dagger and her arm as well.

"Hrmph."

Lyndin immediately dropped her dagger while slamming her left hand directly at Linley.

"Boom!"

Their two hands clashed against each other, and Lyndin hurriedly charged forward. But Linley moved in a strangely graceful way backwards, in the blink of an eye retreating to the corner of the wall.

"Growl."

Haeru and Bebe were both standing by Linley's side, but before Haeru and the others could attack, Lyndin immediately retreated.

"You want to kill me?" Linley stared coldly at Lyndin.

Raising her head high, Lyndin said angrily, "Ley, listen up. I, Danlan, have never begged anyone in my entire life like I did just now. Even when I'm with my master, I've never acted like this before. Three full days! I tried everything I could to beg you to teach me, but you refuse to do so. So what if I want to kill you now? Is there something wrong about that?"

"Such overbearing logic." Linley looked at Lyndin.

Lyndin stood at the gate to Linley's manor, staring angrily at him. "If you have the ability to do so, come and kill me. My fellow apprentices will be arriving soon. If you dare bully me, I'll go tell them about it!"

Right now, Linley's desire to kill had already been aroused.

Regardless of whether this 'Danlan' girl was really the student of the Monolithic Sword Saint, or if she was not, she definitely had tried to kill him just then.

But Linley had this strange feeling of danger.

He couldn't clearly explain where it was coming from, but this feeling was warning him...do not pursue Danlan. If you do, it will be very dangerous.

“Hrmph, you don’t have the guts to kill me, right? Then I’m leaving.” Lyndin arrogantly pushed the door to the manor open, then began walking out. Linley didn’t chase after her, only mentally sending out an order. “Bebe, go through the underground tunnels and take a look to see what is outside.”

Right now, outside Linley’s gate.

The other five experts of the ninth rank were all outside the gate. They had taken up their positions long ago, ready to join with Lyndin in the Angel Battle Formation at any time.

When Lyndin walked out of the courtyard, she used her eyes to signal the other five.

Those five quietly followed behind Lyndin, quickly departing.

“Hrmph.” Exiting the hotel, Lyndin was very unhappy. “If just then, Linley had chased after me, the six of us could’ve killed Linley in the blink of an eye. But he kept hiding in his manor, with those two magical beasts beside him. Even if the six of us ran inside, given Linley’s speed, he definitely would be able to flee.

Lyndin knew very well that killing Linley within the provincial capital was not a wise decision. After all, McKenzie was living in that nearby castle. Given McKenzie’s speed, he could probably fly over here in the blink of an eye.

“Lord, what should we do?” The other five were looking at Lyndin.

“Execute the next strategy.” Lyndin said coldly. “As for killing Linley in a suicide attack, that is an option of last resort, to be used only if we have no other choices.” The other five nodded.

Even Angels wouldn’t be willing to throw away their lives too easily.

“Hrm?” Lyndin suddenly saw a man and a woman being escorted by quite a few guards. Lyndin had seen pictures of Jenne and Keane before. “I hadn’t gone to find them yet, but they actually delivered themselves to me?” Lyndin’s lips began to curve up in a smile.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 46, A Change of Plans

Within the courtyard.

“Boss, just now, when I dug my way through the tunnels and went outside, I saw that five men left alongside that Danlan chick.” Bebe’s eyes were shining with an angry light. “That bad woman! She definitely had ill intentions.”

Linley laughed calmly. “No need to over-think things. That woman was almost certainly someone the Radiant Church sent to kill me. Just now, if I had chased out after her, most likely as soon as I stepped out of the gate, the people lying in ambush outside would’ve attacked at the same time and killed me. If she hadn’t already made up her mind to kill me long ago, why would she have arranged for people to lie in ambush? What’s more, I couldn’t sense those people at all.”

He hadn’t been able to detect the presences of those five men hiding outside. These five men were definitely experts, experts that were no weaker than he himself.

“Master, what should we do, then?” Haeru mentally transmitted.

With a thought, Linley summoned his adamantine heavy sword to his hands. “What should we do? We don’t need to mind them. When Jenne returns, I’ll immediately take her away from here. If they follow, I’ll kill them.”

As long as he wasn’t ambushed, after transforming into his Dragonform, with the adamantine heavy sword in hand, Linley was confident of dealing with even an early-stage Saint-level expert.

A short while later.

“Big brother Ley.” That familiar voice rang out.

“Enter.” Linley laughed as he stood up, casually pulling the gate open. Jenne and Keane walked in.

Keane looked at Linley, sighing. “Big brother Ley, my sis almost got taken advantage of this time. Fortunately I was cautious and arranged people to surround and guard her room.”

“Taken advantage of?” Linley looked at Jenne.

Jenne shook her head and laughed. “It’s nothing. It’s just that Albert, the first successor to the clan leader position. Tonight, he was planning to secretly enter my room. Fortunately, my little bro had taken some precautionary measures. That Albert was afraid of this situation getting out of hand as well. After all, there were many people inside the castle.”

“That Albert has always had bad intentions towards you. I don’t dare to be caught off-guard. Even if I stop being the city governor, so what? No matter what, I won’t allow you to be taken advantage of by that bastard, sis.” Keane said solemnly.

Somewhat moved, Jenne looked at her little brother.

Linley looked at Keane with praise in his eyes as well.

“Sis, in the future, when you are following big brother Ley, you have to take good care of yourself.” Keane’s eyes were starting to turn red. “But as long as you are with big brother Ley, I’m not too worried about you.”

Lyndin was standing not too far away from the hotel, and had watched as Jenne and her younger brother had entered.

“Let’s sit down nearby and take a rest for now.” Lyndin pointed at the first floor of the hotel. “But while resting, we have to keep an eye on things outside. When Jenne and Keane head out, we’ll immediately follow them.”

The other five all nodded, and they followed Lyndin into the hotel.

But after one or two minutes, Albert brought around ten or so people into the hotel.

“Is this the place?” Albert asked one of his subordinates.

“Yes, young master. Miss Jenne entered this hotel.” Hearing this, Albert nodded. “Go investigate for me and find out who the bastard is that Jenne likes.”

As he spoke, Albert rubbed the wound on his face.

Last night, he really did cut quite the sorry figure.

He knew that Jenne was a magus of the third rank, but he himself was a warrior of the fourth rank. He was planning to slip in while she was asleep and rape her. That shouldn’t have been too hard. So, late at night, he stealthily crept towards Jenne’s room.

But who would’ve expected that Jenne’s room had a female guard in it, and not just Jenne.

What’s more, there were guards hidden outside the room as well.

He, the stately successor to the clan leader position of the Jacques clan, was soundly thrashed by that female guard. Fortunately, Jenne and the female guard knew who he was and so had not dared to kill him. At the time, Jenne had also told him to give up, because in the future, she was going to travel to the ends of the earth by the side of the man she loved.

“Could it be that she is going to go by the side of this mysterious warrior of the ninth rank and travel the world with him?” Albert’s heart was filled with suppressed rage.

“Let’s sit here for a while. We’ll have some food and wait.” Albert shouted.

Albert led his group of men into the Nile Hotel as well, into the main floor. But as soon as the fuming Albert entered the hotel, his eyes immediately lit up as he saw who was inside.

Albert stared fixedly at Lyndin.

“This beauty is as lovely as an angel.” Albert sighed to himself.

Albert was quite choosy. He was already bored with ordinary beautiful girls. But Lyndin truly was astonishingly beautiful. Not only were her facial features exquisite, she also had that cold, holy aura about her.

Lyndin, no longer putting on an act, had totally returned to her usual temperament.

The holier and purer a woman seemed, the more Albert desired her. Albert felt extremely satisfied when he had a holy and pure woman beneath his thighs.

“Pretty lady, your humble servant is named Albert Jacques. Very happy to meet you.” Albert walked over, saying modestly.

Lyndin glanced at him, not paying him any attention.

“Fuck off.” One of the golden-haired men next to Lyndin barked.

“You lookin’ to die?” The guard behind Albert immediately drew his weapon, staring coldly at the golden-haired man. This time, as he followed Jenne over, Albert had been very careful.

He knew that Jenne’s paramour was a warrior of the ninth rank, and thus everyone he brought today was an expert. One of them was a student of his great grandfather, a warrior of the ninth rank.

“Jacques?” Lyndin suddenly turned to look at him. She only now had paid attention to the lineage of the buffoon in front of her.

“Yes.” Albert smiled proudly.

One of Albert’s servants said arrogantly, “The young master of my clan is the successor to the clan leader position. Your group actually dares to be impolite to the young master?”

The Northwest Administrative Province was the domain of the Jacques clan. Albert was the successor to the clan leader position. Indeed, he had the right to act so overbearingly.

“Albert.” A middle-aged man standing behind Albert said softly, “None of those six, including that woman, are weak. It is very likely that they are all warriors of the eighth rank, and perhaps even of the ninth.”

Albert was startled.

At this moment, Lyndin rose to her feet, smiling. “Young master Albert, hello. I’ve come with my five fellow apprentices in search of a man we intend to kill.”

“Five fellow apprentices? Who is your master?” The middle-aged man behind Albert asked.

“The Monolithic Sword Saint, Haydson.” Lyndin said.

The reason why Lyndin dared to make wild claims like this was primarily because the Monolithic Sword Saint was a man who liked to roam all about the world. Thus, there were most likely very few people in the entire O’Brien Empire who knew exactly who the apprentices of the Monolithic Sword Saint were.

“The Monolithic Sword Saint?”

Everyone was shocked.

“Young master.” A servant of Albert’s came running over. “Young master, we have the information. The man whom Miss Jenne came here to meet registered under the name of ‘Ley’.”

“Ley?” Albert frowned.

“Never heard of him.” Albert turned to look at the expert he had brought. “Uncle Slan [Si’lan], are you confident you can deal with him?” The middle-aged man frowned.

But hearing this, Lyndin's heart was suddenly swayed.

"Young master Albert, can it be that you have a grudge against that man named Ley?" Lyndin laughed.

Albert looked at her in surprise. "What of it?"

"My five fellow apprentices and I have come to deal with him." Lyndin smiled.

Albert was immediately excited. He really did hope to develop a closer relationship with this holy, pure beauty, and this was an excellent opportunity.

"Perhaps I will not only kill Ley and acquire Jenne, I will also acquire this beauty in front of me." Albert's heart began to quiver. Lyndin's beauty was not one whit inferior to Jenne's, and in fact she was even superior.

Albert smiled. "That is wonderful. Everyone will work together, then. What is your name?"

"I am called Danlan." Lyndin still used the same false name.

"Beautiful Lady Danlan, your master, Lord Haydson, has previously paid a visit to the Jacques clan before as well. At that time, he had spent a full month together with my great grandfather." Albert said, attempting to draw a closer connection.

"Oh?" Lyndin seemed rather surprised.

"Indeed." Albert then looked at the five men behind Lyndin. "Are your people confident in your ability to deal with Ley?"

"Do you not have faith in the disciples my master taught?" Lyndin said somewhat unhappily. That frown on Lyndin's face when she was unhappy only made her look all the more mesmerizing. Albert could almost feel his heart twitching ferociously.

Just as Albert and Lyndin were chatting, the people keeping tabs on Jenne rushed in from the outside.

"Young master, bad news! That Ley took Miss Jenne with him and actually separated from young master Keane. And they just exited the courtyard. It seems they plan to leave."

Albert immediately jumped to his feet.

Albert, Lyndin, and the others all stared at the outside through the window. Indeed, Jenne was following Linley on the street in a direction heading outside of the city.

As far as Keane, his group was taking a different route. The two even waved farewell to each other.

"She's leaving? Jenne is really leaving with this Ley?"

Lyndin's face changed, and her mind became unsettled.

The strategy she had just come up with had just been ruined by Linley suddenly leaving with Jenne. She didn't expect that Jenne would leave with Linley. After all, Jenne had been with Keane for all these years.

"Jenne is really going to leave with that bastard? It seems the two of them really do plan to wander the world together." Albert fumed. "Men, attend me!"

"Don't be hasty." Lyndin's eyes lit up, and she immediately interrupted him.

Albert looked questioningly at Lyndin. Lyndin, by now, knew that with Linley's departure alongside Jenne, her previous plan was now useless.

But there was another way.

"Albert, send some people to follow them. Once they leave the city, we will ride horses after them. Outside the city... my fellow apprentices and I will kill him." Lyndin said confidently.

Outside the city, most likely McKenzie would only be able to arrive after they had already killed Linley.

"Oh?" Albert was delighted. If he didn't have to personally act, of course he would only be all the happier.

"How about this. After they leave the city, lead a squad of knights after them. Myself and my five fellow apprentices will enter the squad, so Linley doesn't notice us at first. When the time is right..." Lyndin laughed coldly.

When Linley was caught off-guard, the six of them would suddenly erupt from the squad and surround Linley, setting up the Angel Battle Formation.

In a short period of time, they would kill Linley.

Once the Angel Battle Formation was successfully set up, they had a virtually 100% chance of killing Linley. After all, when Angels set up the Angel Battle Formation, even if they didn't go all out, they could still kill early-stage Saint-level experts. Once they did go all out and allow their bodies to collapse, even a middle-stage Saint-level expert might perish.

"No problem." Albert patted his chest and guaranteed.

Lyndin and the other five were all smiles, while Albert was smiling radiantly as well.

Outside the city.

Jenne rode on the back of the black panther, while Linley was walking, as smooth and graceful as the wind. While walking, Linley chatted and laughed with Jenne.

Jenne's face was radiant, filled with the light of true happiness. As long as she could often see Linley and chat with him, Jenne felt that she was already very happy and fortunate.

"Jenne, in a bit, please be careful." Linley suddenly said.

"What?" Jenne was somewhat startled.

Linley said casually, "There's a squad of knights chasing after us." A hint of a murderous intent was in Linley's eyes. This squad most likely had to do with the Radiant Church.

"It is about time to truly test the power of the Hundred Layered Waves anyhow." Linley intentionally continued forward at their current pace, allowing the squad to have the chance to catch up.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 47, The Angel Battle Formation

It was deep into autumn already. The cold autumn wind howled across the land like icy blades as an elite squad of knights galloped forward.

“Faster, faster!”

With Albert dressed in simple armor leading the way, the group quickly galloped forward on the desolate road, with several dozen knights following behind Albert. By Albert’s side, there was a middle-aged man, the one and only expert of the ninth rank under Albert’s command.

As for Lyndin and the other five, they were also wearing ordinary knight’s armor and wearing gray knight’s helmets. Just from appearances, one wouldn’t be able to tell that Lyndin and the others were any different from the rest of the knights.

“Remember.” Lyndin said quietly to the five men with her. “When we catch up to Linley, once Albert gives the order to attack, each of you will split up and follow these knights to surround Linley. With Linley off-guard, we’ll execute the Angel Battle Formation. Remember, no matter what, don’t be too hasty with your attack. You absolutely must await my order.”

“Yes, Lord.”

The five all nodded.

A hint of a smile was on Lyndin’s lips. “Giddyup.”

The sound of hoof steps continued to ring out, and the squad kicked up clouds of dust in their wake. In the blink of an eye, they had travelled a great distance.

Linley had intentionally lowered his own speed to allow this group of people to catch up. Naturally, after just a short period of time at full gallop, Albert’s squad saw Linley’s figure.

“He’s right ahead.” Albert was very happy, and he immediately began to shout, “Faster, faster!”

Those knights began to call out loudly as well, and they prodded their horses to gallop even faster. Within the thunder of their hoof steps, this group of knights quickly neared Linley.

“Remember, hang on to Haeru’s neck. Haeru will take you to my place first.” Linley instructed softly.

Jenne looked at Linley with concern. “Big brother Ley, what about you?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll just get rid of this bit of trouble.” At the same time, Linley glanced at his Blackcloud Panther, Haeru. Mentally, he ordered, “Haeru, you can go now. Remember, protect Jenne.”

“Growl.”

Haeru let out an arrogant growl, and then slowly began to speed up before suddenly transforming into a black blur, disappearing far away, without giving Albert’s men any chance to stop him.

“Clatter.” The group of knights totally blocked Linley’s forward path. They didn’t block the Blackcloud Panther from leaving, because they couldn’t block him. As for Lyndin and the others, they were capable of blocking the panther, but they were happy to see it leave.

After all, their target was Linley!

“Jenne!” Seeing this happen, Albert couldn’t help but grow angry.

Turning furiously towards Linley, Albert sneered, “Punk, you had your magical beast take Jenne away? Hrmph, let me tell you, Jenne is mine. As for you...let me send you off to the Netherworld. Haha...everyone, attack!” Albert pointed angrily at Linley.

With the clatter of hoof steps, the dozens of knights immediately surrounded Linley.

Linley just stood there in the middle, not caring in the slightest. Bebe only stood arrogantly on top of Linley’s shoulders, using his beady little eyes to stare disdainfully at the knights.

“My Cousin Jenne isn’t for the likes of you to touch. You should consider what lowly status you have!” Albert said arrogantly. He had the feeling that everything was now under his control.

Linley only calmly glanced at the surrounding knights.

“I originally wanted to get rid of the Radiant Church’s forces. I didn’t expect that I would have attracted this group of useless fools.” Linley shook his head slowly. But right at that moment...

“Boss.” Bebe suddenly stared at the knights. “Danlan is there.”

“Danlan?” As though a bucket of cold water had been poured on Linley’s head, Linley shivered once. “The Radiant Church’s forces are with them?” Linley began to be cautious.

“I can smell her scent.” Bebe said confidently. “She thought that by putting on a helmet and some armor, that I, Bebe, wouldn’t be able to discover her?”

Linley still didn’t call forth any of his weapons.

There was no need to rush to using weapons.

When the weapons suddenly appeared from his interspatial ring at the critical moment, that would catch the opponents off-guard. Linley paid no heed to Albert, who was still arrogantly spouting his nonsense, and instead carefully paid attention to the surrounding knights.

“Charge! Kill him!”

Albert ordered arrogantly.

But just at this moment, a cruel voice rang out as well. “Kill!” Suddenly, six rays of gleaming white light suddenly connected with each other. In terms of appearance, it was exactly the same technique as had been used by the six Special Executors to trap Linley.

That combined formation attack actually was the Angel Battle Formation.

But in terms of power, when actual Angels used this formation, it was far more powerful.

“Swish swish.” Those six rays of light, when connecting, pierced through the bodies of several of the knights that were in the way. Three of them died immediately, while eight were heavily injured.

“Aaah!”

One of the knights was pierced through the chest, leaving a small hole behind. This knight immediately toppled off his horse. He screamed twice, then fell silent.

“Haha, it’s been almost nine years. The Radiant Church hasn’t learned any new tricks.” Linley began to laugh loudly.

“What’s going on?” Albert was terrified.

The middle-aged man by Albert’s side was quite experienced. His face immediately changed, and he shouted, “Quick, leave! Those six are not the disciples of Haydson; they are from the Radiant Church, and they are all experts of the ninth rank. Leave! If you tarry, it’ll be too late!”

Albert was useless in most aspects, but his fleeing instinct was top notch.

“Giddyup, giddyup!” Albert no longer cared about killing Linley at this moment, as he hurriedly galloped away alongside that middle-aged man.

Some of the knights were trapped in the midst of that Angel Battle Formation. Terrified, some of them thought to try and flee out, but as soon as they ran into that white light, their bodies turned to ash, as though they had been burnt by an extremely high temperature flame.

“Hrm? It seems to be more powerful than that of those six Special Executors.” Linley sighed in praise.

“Flee.”

The remaining knights all fled at high speed, while those who did not had all been killed by Lyndin. In the entire desolate landscape, only Linley, Bebe, and Lyndin’s squad remained.

“Boom!”

The armor covering Lyndin and her men split apart as they returned to their normal appearances. One woman and five men. Lyndin’s group stared very confidently at Linley.

“Linley, aren’t you afraid?” Lyndin laughed coldly at Linley.

Linley glanced at Lyndin. “I must admit, your acting abilities are extremely formidable. You were able to successfully play the part of a headstrong young lady. However, you weren’t aware that eight years ago, at the city of Hess, I killed six Special Executors who also used this combination attack.”

“Crack, ripple…”

As Linley was speaking, those black draconic scales pierced through his clothes, while those cold, gleaming spikes erupted one at a time from his spine, his forehead, his elbows, and his knees. A long draconic tail sprouted from behind him as well.

Linley’s eyes had become that cold, remorseless dark gold color.

“Linley, we aren’t the same as those six.” Lyndin said calmly. “Today, you will definitely die.” As she spoke, the density of the light increased once more, seeming to even cover the sky above the area.

Linley’s dark golden eyes swept the six of them. In a cold voice, he said, “I have to tell you something. I...really dislike this formation attack.”

Linley still remembered that dream-like white glow.

“Grandpa Doebling.” Linley could clearly remember the scene when, eight years ago, Grandpa Doebling had sacrificed himself to kill those six Special Executors. From that day forth, Grandpa Doebling had forever vanished from the universe.

“Kill him.”

Lyndin ordered coldly.

“Whoosh!” Lyndin’s group charged forward towards Linley, and that cage of light began to shrink at high speed. Anything and everything touched by that light was turned into dust.

It was utterly unblockable.

“Radiant Church. Haha...” Linley laughed coldly at the six attackers. Kicking off from the ground, he leapt towards one of the attackers.

“How sad.” Lyndin stared coldly at Linley’s attempt to resist.

When joined forces, their defense was incredibly high. No one below the Saint-level could harm them at all. They didn’t care about Linley’s attack at all.

“The first one!”

Linley’s voice suddenly rang out like a bolt of thunder, as from his hands, the adamantite heavy sword suddenly appeared. Transforming into a blur, the adamantite heavy sword slashed through the air, smashing against the body of one of the attackers.

“How laughable.”

The six of them didn’t care at all. That Angel of the ninth rank originally didn’t even bother dodging, but the strange thing was, Linley’s blow hadn’t caused the white light to activate and block it.

Profound Truths of the Earth – Hundred Layered Waves!

Linley’s dark golden eyes stared coldly at the man.

This Angel of the ninth rank only felt a very queer sensation, as though giant warhammers were suddenly smashing against his internal organs again and again. His light-style power was totally useless against this sort of attack!

“Boom!” “Boom!” “Boom!”

Those strange attacks continue to reverberate in the Angel’s head as well as body.

“Ah!”

The ninth ranked Angel slumped to the ground. The Angel Battle Formation, now lacking a person, had been destroyed, and the white light disappeared. Lyndin and the other four stared at this scene in astonishment. They couldn’t believe it.

Linley quirked his lips.

That white light had been light-style energy; in essence, it was the same as battle-qi. But the Profound Truths of the Earth which Linley used was a totally different sort of attack. Whenever it encountered an obstacle, it would transmit through it, with only a bit of reduction in attack power. No obstacle could totally block it.

This so-called combination attack, before the Profound Truths of the Earth, was nothing but a joke.

Linley's full-power attack had disintegrated the internal organs of an Angel of the ninth rank in a single blow. He was dead as dead could be, and his soul vanished from the world.

"You...you killed him?" Lyndin and the other four were stunned.

The Angel Battle Formation had been broken, just like that.

"Formation attacks are useless against me." Linley's remorseless eyes swept them with his gaze. "That's one of you down. Now for the rest of you."

In the Yulan continent, anyone, including Saint-level experts, would die once their bodies were destroyed.

When these Angels who had descended into human bodies fought, even when they went all out, they weren't actually destroying their own bodies. They were just ignoring their bodies' ability to contain their power, in essence overloading them.

This sort of overloading technique would cause the body to slowly break down.

This sort of break down was gradual. Only after, say, thirty seconds, would the body have decayed to the point where the soul could no longer survive in it.

But since Linley reduced the Angel's internal organs into paste with a single blow, even if the Angel wanted to go all out at this point, it was too late.

"Lord?" The other four looked at Lyndin.

A holy light was suddenly shining from Lyndin's face. "Since this mortal has such an unusual attack, we no longer need to worry about our lives. Prepare to return to the embrace of the Lord."

"Yes, Lord."

Their eyes were very cold and calm. Their faces began to shine with holy light as well.

"Swish, swish..." A pair of illusion-like white wings suddenly sprouted from the backs of those four men. In the blink of an eye, those four 'ordinary' men each now were winged, and they flew into the sky.

Four humanoids with wings were flying in the air. Seeing this, Linley was shocked.

"Angels! They are Angels!"

One of the legendary, powerful races had just appeared in front of him. Even the weakest two-Winged Angels were terrifyingly powerful early-stage Saint-level experts.

"Kill." Lyndin issued her order, not wasting any time at all.

This was because the bodies of these four were already beginning to emit blood, which was constantly flowing downwards. Clearly, their bodies were already starting to crumble, and their blood vessels were beginning to collapse. The early-stage Saint-level energy was beyond the capacity of these bodies.

They didn't have much time.

They had to kill Linley as quickly as possible.

“Whoosh!” With a flap of their radiant wings, the four Angels transformed into four white blurs as they charged towards Linley.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 48, The Four-Winged Angel

Tonight, the moon was in the sky. The moon was very bright, covering the wilderness with its desolate glow.

And in this desolate wilderness, four white Angels were gliding down through the air coldly, like an illusionary mirage, drawing ever closer to Linley.

“What incredible speed.” Linley was surprised.

Right now, Linley’s offense was powerful, but his defense was weak. His offense was powerful enough to kill an early-stage Saint-level combatant. But his defense was poor; although he could take blows below the Saint-level of power, he still couldn’t take blows from early-stage Saint-level combatants.

“Hrmph.” Linley launched himself off the ground. With the aid of the Supersonic spell, Linley very agilely began to dodge. In terms of speed, however, Linley was still slightly slower than these four Angels.

“Shkreeeee!”

With an ear-piercing screech, a black blur suddenly appeared, moving even faster than those four Angels, colliding against the Angel nearest Linley.

“Die.” That Angel coldly smashed his fist against the black blur.

“Bam!” The fist, glowing with holy light, smashed viciously against the black blur. The black blur was knocked to the floor, but with a ricochet from the ground, it quickly charged up again.

“Swish!” Two fierce claws extended out, swiping viciously against the Angel.

One claw smashed against the Angel’s fist, while the other struck the Angel’s body. The Angel’s body was already at the point of collapse; struck by such a vicious claw, the body actually trembled, a layer of muscle being ripped open and blood pouring out.

“Bam!” Circling around once, the black blur smashed viciously against the Angel a second time.

This strike only hastened the collapse of the Angel’s body.

With a “boom” sound, the Angel’s body directly disintegrated. The white wings disappeared. Just like that, a Two-Winged Angel had died in battle.

Lyndin, who was watching the battle from behind, stared in astonishment at the black blur.

She could tell that the black blur was Linley’s pet, that adorable Shadowmouse. But by now, the Shadowmouse was already a meter long, no longer just that twenty-centimeter long, hand-sized critter. And the black Shadowmouse was astonishingly fast...even faster than Two-Winged Angels.

Bebe was simply too astonishing.

“Six years ago, in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, Bebe was roughly on par with Haeru in their battle. Six years later, Haeru hasn’t improved at all. He’s at his limit. But Bebe has continued to grow these

six years...in terms of speed, Bebe is now far faster than Haeru. As for defense...perhaps even Barker, a Saint-level Undying Warrior when transformed, doesn't have much higher defense than Bebe." Linley knew exactly how formidable Bebe was.

Right now Bebe's speed was simply too high.

Every day, Linley was absorbed in his bitter training. Bebe did nothing but eat, sleep, sleep, eat. And yet, the pace of his strength growth was faster than Linley's.

One could tell how powerful Bebe had become just from looking at his transformation. From half a meter in the past to 1 meter long now.

"Squeeeeeeak." Bebe let out an excited cry, while mentally transmitting, "Boss, let me handle these Two-Winged Angels. Their attacks can't hurt me at all."

Linley was speechless.

Two-Winged Angels, early-stage Saint rank. Couldn't harm Bebe.

What sort of freakishly powerful magical beast was Bebe?!

The other three Two-Winged Angels, seeing how this black blur's lightning-fast claws had destroyed one of their comrades with two swipes, couldn't help but be filled with both shock and fury.

Not giving them the time to react, Bebe immediately charged towards another one of them.

"Ignore him. Kill Linley." Lyndin's cold voice rang out.

The three Angels paid no more attention to that terrifying black blur, charging towards Linley. But although they paid Bebe no heed, Bebe himself wouldn't let them off.

After all, Bebe was slightly faster than them.

"Whoosh." A black blur flashed by, with Bebe arriving next to one of the Angels.

Linley had run far away, as he was not confident in his ability to deal with the group attack of the Angels. Only in single combat was he confident of success. After all, Linley wasn't like Bebe, with his freakishly tough defense.

"Slash!"

Bebe opened his maw wide, chomping towards one of the Angels.

"Bam!" The Two-Winged Angel slammed his fists against Bebe, but Bebe actually wrapped his twin claws around the Angel's right fist, and then bit at it.

"Crunch!"

The right hand was bitten off.

Resisting the pain, the Two-Winged Angel smashed his left fist against the black Shadowmouse angrily. This attack carried with it virtually all of the power available to the Two-Winged Angel, and his left hand shone like the sun.

“Baaaam!” The left hand smashed against the black Shadowmouse, but at the same time, the black Shadowmouse thrust its claws fiercely against the Two-Winged Angel’s chest.

Skin and flesh ripped open. Blood sprayed everywhere.

Bebe was smashed to the ground, but the Two-Winged Angel’s body trembled. The vessels in its body totally collapsed, and even its heart had imploded, unable to sustain that amount of power any longer. As blood leaked everywhere, the Two-Winged Angel collapsed from the skies.

Yet another Angel had fallen.

“Boss.” Bebe was looking anxiously at Linley.

“Bam!”

Linley was sent flying by a fist, but the Two-Winged Angel’s body shuddered, and then crumbled, falling from the skies. The last remaining Two-Winged Angel immediately chased after Linley.

“Boss!” Bebe’s speed reached its limit. With Linley constantly dodging as well, Bebe managed to interpose himself between Linley and the Angel, just before the Angel would have struck Linley again.

Bebe stared angrily at the Two-Winged Angel.

“Boss, you okay?” Bebe mentally transmitted.

“I’m fine. But if I took more of those blows, I wouldn’t be able to take it.” Linley wiped the blood away from the corner of his lips. Part of the scales around his chest were smashed apart, with blood leaking out from behind them.

Linley couldn’t help but be frightened.

Just then, the two Angels had pincer-attacked him. Linley was slightly slower than them to begin with. In the end, his only option was to block one attack with his own, while accepting the second blow.

“Still not fast enough. If I could match Bebe in terms of speed and defense, I wouldn’t have cut such a sorry state.” Linley sighed to himself.

Six years ago, Bebe was roughly as fast as he was, while Bebe’s defense was a level higher.

But six years later, Bebe’s speed was nearly double his own. In terms of defense, Bebe’s was multiple levels higher now. The most irritating thing was, Bebe remained at the ninth level. He had not reached the Saint-level.

No wonder the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, had submitted to him.

Haeru was a proud magical beast of the ninth rank with extremely high natural talent, but compared to Bebe, his so-called talent was far weaker.

Using his astonishing defense and speed, Bebe dealt with the final Two-Winged Angel. In the blink of an eye, the four Angels had all died. Their leader, Lyndin, remained in her human form, watching from afar.

“Boss, are Two-Winged Angels of the early-stage Saint-level? Why did I feel that they weren’t that powerful?” Landing on the ground, Bebe mentally spoke to Linley.

Linley chuckled, casting a glance at Lyndin.

“Bebe, didn’t you notice that after they utilized their Angelic power, blood began to flow from their bodies? Clearly, their bodies couldn’t withstand that level of power. They weren’t truly early-stage Saint-levels; although they had the power, their bodies were still as weak as before.” Linley had immediately seen the truth of the matter.

Those bodies had been at the breaking point already. A few good blows to those bodies would cause them to totally collapse.

“What a powerful magical beast.”

Staring at Bebe, Lyndin said with surprise, “Linley, I only heard that you had a Shadowmouse, but it seems he isn’t a Shadowmouse. He seems more like the legendary ruler of the rat race....”

“What’s that?” Linley looked at Lyndin.

Linley had always been curious as to exactly what sort of magical beast Bebe was.

“The type of magical beast with the greatest defense and the highest speed...could he really be that type?” Lyndin had lived in the realm of the Radiant Sovereign for many years. As a Four-Winged Angel, she had seen many things.

There were quite a few magical beasts that would reach the Saint-level upon becoming an adult.

But even amongst those, there were still a few extremely rare and outstanding types of magical beasts. This was the first time Lyndin had seen any of the legendary rulers of the rat race.

“Boss, what’s this woman saying?” Bebe looked doubtfully at Linley.

“She’s saying you are a ruler amongst the rats.” Linley chuckled.

Even the likes of Doehring Cowart and the Holy Emperor didn’t know what kind of magical beast Bebe was, but it seemed as though this Lyndin had a bit of a clue. Only, from the sound of it, Lyndin was just guessing, and wasn’t certain.

“Linley, you should feel proud.”

Just now, Lyndin had only been briefly surprised by Bebe’s performance. Now, she had totally calmed down again. “For the sake of killing you, a Cherub, a Four-Winged Angel, is about to die alongside you.”

Lyndin’s entire body began to shine with white light, and then four white wings sprouted forth from Lyndin’s back, stretching and spreading out as Lyndin took to the skies.

A Cherub!

“Not good.” The look on Linley’s face changed. The more wings an Angel had, the more powerful they were, and as the number of wings increased, the power increased at a rapid geometrical rate.

“Boss, let me go!”

Bebe excitedly let out a sharp screech, then transformed into a blur as he charged towards the Cherub.

Lyndin smiled coldly. Her four wings fluttered slightly, and she suddenly transformed into a white blur. Her astonishing speed was actually not one whit inferior to that of Bebe’s.

“Boom!”

Lyndin's fist, clad in holy light and appearing like white jade, smashed against Bebe. This time, Bebe was smashed down, flying into the ground like a meteor and even creating a deep crater in the ground. Bebe's body had been smashed deep into the earth.

"Bebe." Linley was shocked.

Linley had guessed at how powerful this Cherub was, but he didn't expect the Cherub to be so terrifyingly strong.

"Bo-, Boss, I'm fine." Bebe's weak voice rang out in Linley's mind. Linley could guess at how heavily injured Bebe currently was.

The power of a Cherub was far greater than that of a Two-Winged Angel.

"Linley. It is your turn." Lyndin's body was already beginning to be covered with blood, but Lyndin didn't care about her collapsing body at all.

Lyndin knew that she had, at the very least, ten seconds of life left. These ten seconds were more than enough for her to kill Linley.

Those four white wings of light fluttered slightly, and then Lyndin transformed into a white blur. Linley couldn't see her clearly, as she appeared almost like a mirage, suddenly appearing in front of him.

The only thing Linley could see were Lyndin's cold, remorseless eyes, now silver in color.

"Time to go all out!"

"Ah!!!"

Linley launched himself off the ground, rapidly retreating while at the same time, the Bloodviolet Godsword appeared in his hand. He immediately activated that terrifying baleful aura hidden within Bloodviolet.

This terrifyingly baleful aura had influenced even the peak-stage Saint-level expert, Stehle, much less Lyndin.

Trembling slightly, that strange bloody light covered and began to flow on the surface of Bloodviolet.

That baleful aura entered Lyndin's mind, attacking her soul.

"This..." A hint of fear suddenly appeared in Lyndin's cold eyes. She only sensed that she seemed to have returned to that time when she was with the army of Angels engaging in warfare in other planes, and had suddenly encountered within the depths that terrifying demon. She still remembered how that demon had easily butchered so many of the Angels. An entire army of hundreds of thousands of Angels had been butchered.

That full-power punch of hers, under the influence of Bloodviolet, began to grow weaker.

At the same time as he activated Bloodviolet, Linley fiercely swung his adamantine heavy sword forward, chopping mercilessly against Lyndin's body.

Profound Truths of the Earth – Hundred Layered Waves.

"Boom!" Linley was struck by Lyndin's fist as well, which had been reduced to roughly half-power. His black scales immediately split apart, and Linley's chest caved in as a large volume of blood poured out of Linley's mouth.

Like a ripped sandbag, Linley smashed against the ground, kicking up a huge cloud of dust.

Lyndin stood there disbelievingly.

“How could he possess such a terrifying baleful aura?” And then, Lyndin suddenly felt herself bound by the Laws of the universe. Her soul, not resisting in the slightest, was drawn forth by the Laws, disappearing from the plane of the Yulan continent.

As for Lyndin’s corpse, it gently slumped down, fresh blood leaking from her mouth and nose.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 49, Saint-Level Dragonblood Warrior

The cold wind continued to blow.

The desolate wilderness had finally returned to its former calm. But compared to earlier, atop the wild plains, there were a number of corpses as well as pools of blood. The aftermath of the battle was easily visible. The ground was cracked open in many places, and there was that giant crater, with that deep hole in the center of it. At this moment, a black Shadowmouse slowly, wearily crawled out of that deep hole.

“Boss.” Bebe’s body was stained red, blood matting his fur.

Bebe was staring forward in concern. He saw that Linley was lying there, not moving at all. Although the Cherub, thanks to the influence of the Bloodviolet sword’s baleful aura, had seen its attack weakened, the force of its blow was still several times greater than that of the Two-Winged Angels.

Bebe scurried forward, arriving next to Linley.

“Boss, you okay?” Bebe mentally transmitted. Bebe was very worried. Right now, Linley’s chest had an astonishingly deep indentation, with over half of the scales on his chest shattered and fallen. Fresh blood had dyed Linley’s chest totally red, and Linley’s face was very pale. His eyes were closed.

Slowly, Linley opened his eyes, looking at Bebe.

“I’m fine. Bebe. Don’t move my body.” Linley’s voice rang out in Bebe’s mind.

Bebe nodded obediently, settling into a curl near Linley’s body.

“This time, I was wounded very badly.” Linley felt that his chest was wracking him with severe pain with each breath he took. Linley’s only option was to urge the Dragonblood battle-qi in his vessels to help repair some of the damage he had taken, in accordance with the method prescribed in the ‘Secret Dragonblood Manual’. As a Supreme Warrior, his recuperative abilities were quite formidable.

But this time, the injury really was very severe.

The Dragonblood battle-qi slowly flowed through each part of his body, as the unique energy of the Dragonblood in his veins slowly seeped into his blood vessels and heart. As for his chest, which had suffered the majority of the damage this time, after it drew some of the special energy from his Dragonblood, Linley could feel it slowly begin to recover. With each breath, Linley could feel his chest slowly changing.

“In terms of regenerative speed, amongst the Four Supreme Warriors, the Dragonblood Warriors should be inferior to the Violetflame Warriors and the Undying Warriors.” In a time like this, this thought suddenly crossed Linley’s mind.

The Violetflame Warriors possessed incredibly strong regenerative abilities, and even had that freakishly powerful Nirvana Rebirth ability.

Unless their bodies were entirely destroyed, given enough time, a Violetflame Warrior would be able to recover to their peak condition.

“Huff.” “Puff.”

The sound of Linley’s breathing grew louder and louder, as his damaged chest continued to recuperate. At the same time, the black scales covering Linley’s body retracted, as did his spikes and his tail. In the blink of an eye, Linley returned to his normal human form. But despite now being in human form, Linley’s body was still covered in blood, and the injury to his chest was as severe as ever.

As time passed, the night began to deepen.

The cold wind blew drearily. The light of the moon was totally blocked by the clouds. But Linley and Bebe paid no heed to the weather at all.

“Boss, doing better?” Bebe’s beady little eyes stared unwaveringly at Linley.

“My internal injuries are more or less fixed. Only, three of my ribs are broken. Fortunately, they didn’t pierce into any other vital regions.” Linley revealed a smile towards Bebe. “However, it will take at least ten days or half a month for broken ribs to recover.” Normal people would need several months to heal a broken rib. Linley was only able to make this claim because of his confidence in his lineage as a Dragonblood Warrior.

Bebe nodded.

“But if I were able to find a light-style or a water-style magus, I should be able to recover even more quickly.” Linley knew that certain types of magical healing could be extremely powerful.

When Linley had been imprisoned within the Radiant Temple, virtually every single bone in his body had been broken. But when he had been bathed in that holy light of the Radiant Sovereign, his body completely healed in the blink of an eye, and was restored to peak condition. This sort of astonishing recuperative ability was very formidable.

Linley continued to generate his Dragonblood battle-qi.

The Dragonblood battle-qi absorbed the elemental essence from nature, and it also absorbed the unique Dragonblood lineage in Linley’s veins. As it gradually strengthened, it nourished every part of Linley’s body. Linley’s internal injuries were now almost completely healed. The only tricky part remaining was his shattered ribs.

“Hrm?”

Linley’s eyebrows shot up, and he felt a hint of delight.

The Dragonblood battle-qi circulating throughout his body suddenly began to tremble, and the liquefied Dragonblood battle-qi in his dantian suddenly roiled about like the waves of the sea. Linley immediately guided all of the Dragonblood battle-qi in his veins into his lower dantian. Very soon...the density of Dragonblood battle-qi in his lower dantian reached its maximum peak.

“Rumble...”

A radiant smile blossomed on Linley’s face as he sensed the Dragonblood battle-qi in his dantian begin to transform.

Every single shred of battle-qi was changing. Changing in quality and nature.

“I’m finally beginning to break through.” Linley calmly waited. At first, only a small amount of Dragonblood battle-qi had been transformed, but as time went on, more and more transformed, and at a faster and faster rate. At the end, in the space of time it would take a person to breathe ten times, the remaining half of the battle-qi all transformed successfully.

“Haha...”

Linley rose to his feet, dispersing the totally transformed Dragonblood battle-qi in his veins to every part of his body. Some of it was sent to his shattered ribs, assisting them to recover more rapidly.

“Boss?” Bebe looked at Linley with curiosity.

Linley hugged Bebe, lifting him into the air. Laughing, he said, “I’m fine. Let’s prepare to go home.”

At this time, Linley was extremely happy. Ever since he had reached the peak of the eighth rank, he had been waiting for this day. Although in the past month, Linley had the feeling that he could break through at any moment, that moment somehow just wouldn’t come. But now, while he had been healing his injuries, he had suddenly broken through.

The ninth rank!

From this day forward, Linley was a warrior of the ninth rank...but that was just his nominal level of power. In reality, after Dragonforming, Linley was already an early-stage Saint-level combatant. In terms of defense, speed, or power, he had dramatically grown.

“If I were to encounter that Four-Winged Angel again, just by using the adamantine heavy sword, I would be able to dispose of her.” Linley was very excited.

The Saint-level!

That was a brand new level of existence. Even the mighty Dawson Conglomerate desperately desired to have a Saint-level warrior amongst their ranks. The mighty Jacques clan was mighty, precisely because they had a single Saint-level combatant. This was their pride and the source of their arrogance. This was why they had the confidence and the ability to administer the O’Brien Empire’s Northwest Administrative Province in perpetuity.

An expert of the Saint-level.

Before a Saint-level combatant, even the Grand Dukes and Kings who administered and ruled over populations of millions or tens of millions meant nothing at all.

Before a Saint-level combatant, even an ancient clan that had existed for thousands of years would have to lower their noble heads.

Even the Radiant Church, the Cult of Shadows, and the Four Great Empires would deeply desire to pull Saint-level combatants into their orbit!

In the entire Yulan continent, aside from those three humans who stood at the peak of the world (the High Priest, the War God, and the King of Killers), or the two deity-level Kings of magical beasts, Saint-level combatants were the cream of the crop. Upon entering the Saint-level, one would immediately possess an unlimited life. The King of Killers, Cesar, had lived for five thousand years as a Saint-level, had he not?

“The Saint-level!”

Linley raised his head to the sky.

Suddenly, flakes of snow began to drift down from the heavens, melting when they touched Linley's face.

"I still remember those two Saint-level experts doing battle in Wushan township when I was a child. At that time, Saint-level combatants were unfathomably high entities, far beyond the likes of me. Even that magus of the eighth rank who rode on a Velocidragon was an expert. But now?" A sense of pride swelled up in Linley's heart.

At last, he had accomplished something.

Most likely, if the current Linley were to encounter the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon, he would be able to defeat him.

"Ancestors of the Baruch clan, keep watching me. I will restore the fame and the legend of the Dragonblood Warriors, and spread it across the continent." Linley felt a sense of absolute self-confidence.

Linley was only twenty six years old, this year. But upon Dragonforming, he was a Saint-level warrior.

"There will come a day when I reach an even higher peak of power." A hint of a smile was on Linley's face.

Linley knew exactly how powerful he was. Although he was only an early-stage Saint-level after Dragonforming, the hardest part of advancing from the early-stage to the peak-stage of the Saint-level was not in accumulating battle-qi. Rather, it was in gaining a deeper level of understanding and insight regarding the world. But Linley's level of understanding was already at that of a peak-stage Saint-level.

In truth, sometimes two people who had the same amount of battle-qi and similarly deep levels of understanding would still have major differences in their power.

This was because different people would walk different paths to wisdom, even if they were in the same realm.

For example, another combatant might also be training in the Laws of the Earth, but after the 'impose' level, he might have taken a totally different route. After all, the Laws of the Earth were as boundless and infinite as the oceans, and there were many paths one could take in understanding them. Different paths would result in different results. Linley's path was akin to the throbbing pulse of the earth itself, using those strange vibrational attacks. It was totally different to the usual types of force and power based attacks used within the Yulan continent.

Just as Linley was preparing to head back to the Cloudpeaks Village, suddenly....

"Linley, right?" A voice rang out from not too far behind him.

Linley's heart jumped in fright. He hadn't noticed that there was someone nearby. He immediately turned his head to look, only to see a black-robed, skinny old man with a few flecks of white in his hair, standing in mid-air. The old man was staring down at Linley from mid-air.

Linley immediately understood. "McKenzie?"

"Right." This person was indeed McKenzie.

Linley had just suffered a serious wound, and had been focusing on healing himself. He had totally forgotten that this major battle he had just fought against those six Angels definitely would not escape the attention of the nearby Saint-level combatant, McKenzie, who was residing in the provincial capital.

Linley carefully looked at McKenzie. McKenzie looked as though he were in his early fifties. Although his hair had a few streaks of white, there wasn't a single wrinkle on his face. He stood in mid-air with his waist

ramrod straight, with an immovable aura that made Linley feel secretly amazed. This McKenzie was definitely more powerful than that Four-Winged Cherub.

“How long have you been here?” Linley asked.

McKenzie laughed. “Not too long. When I arrived, I managed to witness you and the Four-Winged Cherub exchanging your final blows to each other and injuring each other.”

Linley raised an eyebrow.

This McKenzie should have been watching the entire time as Linley had been healing himself. Since he didn’t act against Linley when Linley was injured, he probably didn’t have any ill intentions towards Linley.

“I am very surprised that you actually managed to kill a Cherub.” McKenzie sighed in appreciation.

“Although the Four-Winged Angels are only temporarily able to use their full strength, for you to be able to kill one without dying is quite amazing. Dragonblood Warriors...the legendary Dragonblood Warriors really are powerful. Linley, after Dragonforming, you should be at the Saint-level, I believe. Only, given how difficult it was for you to kill a Cherub, you should only be an early-stage Saint-level warrior, right?”

Linley started, not knowing whether he should laugh or cry.

“This McKenzie...jeeze...” Linley was speechless. He thought to himself, “Only after I killed the Four-Winged Angel did I gain the ability to reach the Saint-level in Dragonform. This McKenzie actually thinks that I had already reached the Saint-level when I was fighting with the Cherub.”

“What, you haven’t reached the Saint-level?” McKenzie said disbelievingly.

Linley smiled. “I admit that after Dragonforming, I am indeed at the early-stage Saint-level.”

McKenzie laughed and nodded with satisfaction. “Haha, it’s been a long time since I’ve seen a Saint-level combatant. I really am quite happy to see you today. How about this. Come with me to my residence for a time. That way, the two of us can spar a bit. I’m sure that this will definitely help both of us improve our abilities. Don’t worry, I won’t go full force; this is just a sparring match.”

Seeing that Linley suffered serious injuries while killing a Four-Winged Angel, McKenzie believed Linley was not truly a match for him.

“McKenzie, my Dragonform is indeed at the Saint-level. However...” Linley looked confidently at McKenzie. “I just broke through to that level now, after the battle. When I was fighting against the Cherub, I hadn’t broken through yet.” Right now, as far as Linley was concerned, although he wasn’t confident in his ability to deal with peak-stage Saint-level experts, he was still confident in dealing with people at McKenzie’s level.

Having reached the Saint-level, there was no longer a need for him to conceal himself or hide his power.

“What? You broke through just now?” McKenzie was shocked to hear this.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 50, An Appointment

McKenzie's view of Linley had totally changed.

“Haha...” After being silent for a moment, McKenzie laughed loudly. He descended from the skies, slowly walking towards Linley, his attitude noticeably more warm and friendly. “Linley, the legendary genius magus, supposedly the second greatest genius in history. But in my opinion, your talent as a warrior is even greater than as a magus. To be so young and yet already have the power of the Saint-level...the Dragonblood Warriors truly are Supreme Warriors.”

Linley had always been proud of his clan's heritage. But whenever he thought back to how his clan had all but been destroyed, with only himself and his younger brother remaining, he couldn't help but feel a thread of grief in his heart.

“Mr. McKenzie, is there anything else? If there isn't, I need to go back now.” Linley said.

McKenzie hurriedly said, “My friend Linley, this is our first meeting. Why don't we have a nice get-together? I'm very curious about you legendary Dragonblood Warriors as well. If there's enough time, I truly do wish to have a sparring contest against you, Linley. After all, sparring against experts of the same level is one of the best ways a Saint-level combatant can improve.” As he finished speaking, McKenzie looked very earnestly at Linley.

Spar?

McKenzie was the local hegemon of the Northwest Administrative Province. Being able to get on good terms with McKenzie was of benefit to him. And in addition, Keane belonged to the Northwest Administrative Province as well. This could be considered helping Keane out as well.

Considering for a moment, Linley nodded. “I'm still wounded. Even if I did go to your residence, I wouldn't be able to immediately spar with you. How about this? I'll go home first, but after a period of time, I'll come back and pay a visit to you. It won't be too long, a month or so at most.”

McKenzie happily nodded. “Wonderful. Then I will await your arrival within the Jacques clan's castle.”

“I'll definitely come.”

Linley smiled and nodded.

It had begun to snow, and snowflakes were flying everywhere. McKenzie and Linley, these two Saint-level combatants, smiled at each other, then flew off in different directions.

In the vast wilderness, only Linley and Bebe were left present.

“The winter's snow.” Seeing the endless snowfall, Linley suddenly thought back to that huge blizzard that winter when he was young and in love with Alice.

The next year, also on a day of a blizzard, Linley and Alice had separated.

And then, within the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, on another snowy day, Linley had come to understand the 'impose' level.

Now, on a fourth blizzard, tonight, Linley had broken through to the ninth rank as a warrior, with his true power now totally within the realm of the Saint-levels.

"Snow..."

Linley felt extremely moved. But when he lowered his head and looked at himself, his smile disappeared. Astonished, he said, "I chatted with a Saint-level combatant for such a long time, looking like this?"

Because of his transformation and his battle against the Angels, Linley's clothes and pants had been turned utterly ruined.

The way he currently looked, even beggars would probably feel sorry for him.

However, just now, McKenzie hadn't paid any attention to his attire. In truth, when many Saint-level combatants engaged in training, they would sometimes train for months at a time. It was normal for their bodies to become incredibly filthy. Thus, they didn't care too much about superficial appearances. What they cared about was what a person was like inside.

For example, although Linley's clothes were in absolutely wretched shape, no one would dare look down upon him as he stood there.

This was a person's aura and demeanor.

"Boss, you said you have reached the Saint-level? Transform and let me admire my Boss's magnificence." Bebe's beady little eyes stared at Linley as he intentionally said those flattering words.

An excited feeling entered Linley's heart.

That was not a bad idea at all.

"Fine." Linley said with a laugh. Bebe immediately leapt off of Linley's shoulders as once again, those black scales emerged from Linley's skin. Sharp spikes erupted from his forehead, knees, and elbows, while his eyes once more transformed into that dark golden color.

He looked exactly the same as he had before.

But Linley could feel the difference.

"Whoosh." Linley felt the unique energy of the exalted Dragonblood hiding in his veins begin to flow into his bones, his muscles, and even his armor, spikes, and draconic tail.

The originally pitch-black scales were actually beginning to shine with a hint of blue light.

"What a feeling of power."

Linley could feel that his vision and his hearing had suddenly increased dozens of times in sensitivity. Nothing within several kilometers of him could escape his notice.

"Such powerful strength. Such powerful battle-qi."

Linley balled his fist, and the air itself shuddered once. His mighty muscles now contained far greater power than before, and the amount of battle-qi in his body had grown vastly.

“Haha...” Linley began to laugh excitedly.

Late at night. Linley was flying across the desolate landscape. He, a fully transformed Dragonblood Warrior, looked like a monster as he floated through the air, occasionally letting out overjoyed bouts of wild laughter.

His laughter echoed in the heavens and in the earth.

“No wonder Barker was so excited when he reached the Saint-level. I didn’t expect that my power would increase this much after reaching this level.” Linley was extremely excited as well.

Dragonblood Warriors had many innate gifts. Once their power reached a certain level, they would naturally be able to fly. This was like the flight which flying magical beasts innately possessed; it was a natural ability which didn’t require any particular understanding or insights.

“In terms of mysteriousness and exaltedness, the bloodline of the Armored Razorback Wyrms is far inferior to the lineage of us Dragonblood Warriors.” Flying high in the air, Linley felt a sense of awe.

Originally, Linley had drunk a large amount of dragon’s blood as well as eaten the draconic crystal of the Armored Razorback Wyrms. But despite that, the Dragonblood in Linley’s vein had been able to dissolve and absorb it all.

And now, upon entering the Saint-level, Linley could sense that the energy of the Dragonblood heritage in his veins was continuing to transform and strengthen various functions in his body.

“My speed has doubled, at least.” With but a thought, Linley suddenly transformed into a blur as he streaked across the sky.

“As for defenses...” Linley looked at his now perfect, undamaged scales, paying special attention to that dim layer of blue light. “If I were to take another blow from that Four-Winged Angel, I would at most suffer some light wound.”

Linley’s lips curved upwards.

Confidence!

Unmatchable confidence!

Actually, most human Saint-level experts had very weak defense. Even experts of the peak-stage Saint-rank had far inferior defense compared to Saint-level magical beasts.

But the Four Supreme Warriors possessed talents and gifts that were even more freakishly powerful than that of magical beasts.

This was one of the reasons why, as soon as a Dragonblood Warrior reached the Saint-level in human form, they would immediately be at the peak-stage of the Saint-level in power after Dragonforming. They were invincible. Understanding and insight made no difference.

Even just by relying on raw force, they were an invincible force amongst Saint-levels.

This was their natural talent!

Much like how Haeru was jealous of how powerful Bebe had become, the Four Supreme Warriors were worthy of admiration and jealousy from any race in the entire Yulan continent.

“Boss.” Bebe leaped up into the air.

Linley stretched his arm out, catching Bebe in mid-air, and Bebe jumped onto Linley's shoulders. Linley was now covered totally with dark scales, while on his shoulders there was a black Shadowmouse.

It really was quite a matching sight.

"Bebe, time for you to experience the flight speed of a true Saint-level expert." Linley laughed loudly, then exerted himself to his utmost, transforming into a black blur as he streaked across the skies, disappearing into the horizon.

The snow continued to fall across the night-shrouded wilderness.

Only the corpses on the ground gave testament to the battle that had been fought here.

The straight-line flying speed of a Saint-level was extremely fast. In an hour, Linley was able to cross over a thousand kilometers. In a very short period of time, Linley saw Cloudpeaks Village up ahead.

Tonight, the snow-covered Cloudpeaks Village was very quiet.

Linley flew directly to the western side of the village, dropping down at high speed like a meteor as he landed into the middle of the courtyard.

"Who comes!" A low roar as several shadows flashed out.

Linley had been flying so fast that he had been creating sonic booms. Naturally, he attracted the attention of experts such as the Barker brothers. But once they saw that the person in front of them was the Dragonformed Linley, they all secretly sighed.

"Hrm, you entered without even opening the door?" The fifth brother, Gates, said in astonishment, then he stared at Linley. "Lord, could it be that...?"

Laughing, Linley glanced at Gates.

Gates was the most intelligent and mentally agile of the five brothers, and was the first one to grasp the concept of 'wielding something heavy as though it were light.'

"Ah! Saint-level!" The others now realized as well, and the five brothers stared at Linley in astonishment.

"Big brother Ley returned?" Jenne's voice rang out, as she ran out as well. But as she saw Linley's transformed appearance, she was so scared that she immediately screamed, "Monster!"

Rebecca and Leena, who shared the room with her, quickly consoled her.

"Jenne, that's big brother Linley. That's his Dragonblood Warrior transformation." Rebecca laughed.

Linley returned to his normal human form. Badly frightened just now, Jenne stared stupidly at the transformation, then looked at Rebecca. "Dragonblood Warrior? What's a Dragonblood Warrior?"

"Haha, Dragonblood Warriors are one of the Four Supreme Warriors. We five brothers are also Supreme Warriors. We are the Undying Warriors!" Gates said arrogantly.

Jenne looked at the surrounding group of people.

When she had arrived here tonight with Haeru, she temporarily took up residence with Rebecca and Leena. But when Rebecca and Leena were introducing everyone to her, they had only gotten around to introducing Zassler.

Jenne hadn't even finished getting over her amazement at hearing that Zassler was an Arch Magus necromancer before, suddenly, this 'Dragonblood Warrior' and these 'Undying Warrior' concepts popped up as well.

"This...you all are..." Jenne's mind was in chaos.

"Jenne, go back and get some rest." Linley laughed as he spoke.

Barker and his brothers were all stunned by Linley's breakthrough. The second brother, Ankh [An'ke], laughed helplessly. "Lord, you broke through at such speed. Big brother Barker has reached the Saint-level as well, but still wasn't your match. Now...the difference between us has increased even more."

"If he wasn't powerful, would he be our Lord, and lead us against the Radiant Church to seek vengeance?" Gates said arrogantly.

"All of you are close to having the power of the Saint-level." Zassler's face had a smile on it. "Fortunately, this old fogey has finally gained some certain insights. I trust that within ten years, I should be able to break through and reach the Saint-level."

Ten years?

Zassler was over eight hundred years old. To him, ten years was a fairly short period of time.

"A Grand Magus necromancer? That is an incredibly terrifying idea." Linley's eyes shone. "By that time, you'll be able to summon Saint-level departed souls, and lead an army of millions of departed souls!"

An Arch Magus necromancer of the ninth rank was already very frightening.

But a Grand Magus necromancer was as terrifying as an entire Empire, all by himself.

"Haha, everyone, keep growing stronger. Fuck, does the Radiant Church still dare send people over? If they send one, we'll kill one. If they send ten, we'll kill ten. Then we'll let Zassler create undead slaves out of their corpses and use them to counter-attack." As Gates spoke, he grew excited over his idea.

Everyone was very happy. Their strength increasing meant that they were now becoming more qualified to fight head on against the Radiant Church.

Linley was very happy as well.

Raising his head towards the sky, watching the snow drift about, Linley then turned his gaze to everyone present. "Alright, there's a blizzard tonight. Everyone should go inside the main hall if we want to chat."

"Right! Tonight, we won't stop until we are all drunk." Even the reliable and steady Barker was roaring loudly in his happiness.

The party went on for half the night. In truth, whether or not they would be able to fight against the Radiant Church depended entirely on their power. The reason Linley was their leader was because he was the most powerful amongst them.

Time passed. In the blink of an eye, three days had gone by.

Jenne had grown to fully understand everyone's background, and she slowly came to accept it all. Only now did Jenne truly understand that to these people, the city governor of a prefectural city was nothing at all.

In fact, not just a prefectural city; even the mighty Jacques clan, the rulers of the Northwest Administrative Province, didn't trouble Linley's group. They only viewed the Jacques clan as equals, and that only because of the existence of McKenzie.

"Barker, his brothers, and big brother Linley are all so hard working." Rebecca, Leena, and Jenne, these three beautiful ladies, were chatting amongst themselves while carrying baskets through the manor.

But just as they entered the courtyard, they suddenly saw....

The Shadowmouse, Bebe, floating in mid-air. Seeing Jenne and the others, he winked flirtatiously towards the three of them. Bebe opened his mouth, and out of it came crisp, clear human speech.

"Wow, three pretty girls. Hello, ladies!"

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 51, Wharton

The imperial capital of the O'Brien Empire. Channe [Chi'yan]. In the entire Yulan continent, perhaps only the capital of the Yulan Empire could match Channe in terms of size.

As for the name 'Channe', the War God O'Brien himself had chosen this name.

The imperial capital, Channe. There were millions of residents living here.

As a capital with over five thousand years of history, Channe had many ancient clans. In a place such as the imperial capital of Channe, even experts of the ninth rank were quite common. No one dared to act rashly in the imperial capital, because there were far too many powerful clans here.

But of course, the number one power of the imperial capital of Channe was, without a doubt, the War God's College.

Although the personally taught disciples of the War God virtually never showed their faces, even the weakest of the honorary disciples were at least warriors of the eighth rank, while most were warriors of the ninth rank. From this, one could tell how astonishingly powerful the War God's College was. And of course, there was the master of the War God's College. The War God himself.

It must be understood that in the O'Brien Empire, all other religions were outlawed. Even the commoners prayed to the War God. The War God had become the object of their faith!

From this, one could tell how important the War God was in the hearts of the commoners.

The east part of the imperial capital of Channe was a place covered with palaces and noble residences, with the imperial palace located within the east city as well. Within East Channe there was a street named Boulder Street, and on each side of Boulder Street there were meticulously constructed manors. These were all built by the order of the imperial clan of the Empire, and were given as rewards to the nobles and government officials who had rendered great deeds unto the Empire.

One of the manors on Boulder Street was the residence of the newest rising star of the Empire, Count Wharton. Two sturdy guards stood at each side of the gate to his residence, their waists stiff. And right now, within the main hall of the manor, there were four people.

All four of them were standing, but one of them was pacing about, a hint of a frown appearing on his brows.

He seemed to be roughly twenty one or twenty two years old. He wore a simple warrior's outfit, with the sleeveless outfit totally revealing his bulging muscles. He had a straight nose, thick black eyebrows, and a blocky, angular face, making him look very courageous and fierce.

But the most astonishing thing about him was his body.

He had the astonishing height of 2.2 meters. He had massively broad shoulders, a comparatively narrow waist, and two toned, powerful legs.

"Just by looks, Wharton does seem to be more astonishing than Linley." Hillman said to himself.

Compared to Wharton, Linley appeared to be more reserved and understated.

“Young master Wharton, are you still worrying about the Seventh Princess?” Housekeeper Hiri, his nose red from drinking wine, began to chortle. Wharton turned to look at him helplessly. “Grandpa Hiri, you know who those people chasing after Nina [Ni’na] are.”

The other young man in the group of four laughed. “Young master Wharton, why has a bold, forthright man such as yourself become so squeamish and nervous when it comes to matters of love? Why don’t you just go with her to meet with His Imperial Majesty? Isn’t that simple?”

“Just go directly?” Wharton raised an eyebrow.

Hillman encouraged as well, “Nader [Na’de] is right. You are already a warrior of the eighth rank, and the scion of the Dragonblood Warrior clan. His Imperial Majesty surely knows that for a scion of the Dragonblood Warrior clan to reach the eighth rank means that he definitely has been able to train in Dragonblood battle-qi, and has the ability to transform.”

As Hillman saw it, for someone to reach the eighth rank without training in battle-qi was virtually impossible.

But Hillman had no idea that right now, by Linley’s side, there were five brothers who had reached the eighth rank just based on physical training.

“Wharton, as a Dragonblood Warrior, you are a fit and qualified match to wed the Seventh Princess. I trust His Imperial Majesty will agree.” Housekeeper Hiri laughed as he spoke. “But as for asking for her hand, I think it might be better if you let the Seventh Princess to sound His Imperial Majesty out first. That way, you’ll have a better idea going in.”

Housekeeper Hiri and Hillman glanced at each other, then both of them began to laugh.

In the past year or two, the relationship between Wharton and the Seventh Princess of the Empire had become quite well known throughout the entire imperial capital. Only, the other young nobles of the imperial capital had refused to give up. What’s more, two of them were quite competitive.

“Enough of that for now.” Wharton shook his head.

He trusted the Seventh Princess. The Seventh Princess had already told him long ago that aside from him, she wouldn’t marry anyone else. But Wharton also knew that the marriage of an imperial princess of the Empire was not up to her alone to decide. In addition, Wharton didn’t want the Seventh Princess to be too frustrated and unhappy. If he could openly wed her, that would be for the best.

“Oh, right. Grandpa Hiri, any news of my big brother?” Wharton asked.

Housekeeper Hiri nodded. “The Dawson Conglomerate has sent word that your big brother remains hidden in seclusion, where he continues to train. There’s no special news.”

“Big brother is as hard working as ever.” In his heart, Wharton admired Linley very much.

Many of the weighty responsibilities of the Dragonblood Warrior clan, such as the reclaiming of their ancestral heirloom, or the avenging their parent’s deaths, had been shouldered by Linley alone. As for him, Wharton, he could remain here in the imperial capital and quietly train.

Even from afar, Linley continued to shield him from the wind and the rain.

“Big brother...” Wharton still remembered how when he was young, when those two Saint-level combatants were doing battle outside Wushan Township, those boulders had rained down densely from the skies. His big brother had ignored his own safety to cover Wharton with his own body.

Wharton could clearly remember that dangerous moment....

“Get down!” Linley had angrily shouted at Wharton, while charging towards him with no regard for his own safety. Linley had used his own weak, frail body to shield Wharton.

After leaving home at the age of six, Wharton was now twenty two years old. In another month, he would be twenty three.

It had been almost seventeen years.

He hadn’t seen his sibling in seventeen years.

“Young master Wharton, don’t worry too much. Young master Linley will come find you once his training reaches a certain level. After all, he knows exactly where you are living.” Housekeeper Hiri said consolingly.

Wharton nodded, then chuckled at himself. “When big brother sees me, I wonder if he’ll still recognize me.”

“The little six year old kid has changed quite a bit. Haha...it’s true that your big brother might not recognize you.” Hillman began to laugh.

Nader nodded as well. “When I came along with my father from the Holy Union, I initially couldn’t recognize you either, young master Wharton. It was only after I saw Housekeeper Hiri did I realize that this big fellow who was even taller than me was actually that little kid I used to know.”

“Nader, you punk.” Wharton glared at him.

Nader was Hillman’s son. However, Nader didn’t have much talent as a warrior; although he was already twenty five years old, Nader was only a warrior of the fourth rank. But Nader was extremely discreet and careful, and so alongside his father Hillman, he managed and oversaw the work of all the guards of the manor.

“Whoah, it’s getting late.” Wharton took out a pocket watch and cast it a glance. “Grandpa Hiri, Uncle Hillman, I need to head out.”

“He must be meeting up with the Seventh Princess again.” Nader snickered, intentionally putting a smirk on his face.

Wharton laughed confidently towards Nader. “Naturally. What, are you jealous?” As he spoke, Wharton chortled as he walked out of the manor.

Watching Wharton leave, Housekeeper Hiri felt very moved.

“When we came, young master Wharton was just a child. But now, he’s all grown up. I have fulfilled the task Lord Hogg gave me.” When he thought of Hogg, Hiri couldn’t stop sighing.

“The Baruch clan has been slumbering for many years. But now, it has finally begun to awaken. In another ten years, most likely the entire Yulan continent will once again be filled with people discussing the legendary Dragonblood Warriors.” Hillman said confidently.

Carrying the warblade ‘Slaughterer’, Wharton rode on a Saber-Toothed Tiger on the streets. Saber-Toothed Tigers were magical beasts of the eighth rank, and thus their aura would make ordinary magical beasts

cower away from it. What's more, Wharton was so physically huge himself. Together, they posed such a terrifying sight that everyone who saw him felt dread.

Thus, the pedestrians on the street all made way for him.

"That's the genius student of the O'Brien Academy, Wharton. Look. He's riding a magical beast of the eighth rank."

"Saber-Toothed Tiger. How fierce! If I had a magical beast of my own, how great that would be."

Many people on the streets chatted about Wharton as he passed by. In the past, when Linley had seen that Velocidragon for the first time, he too had dreamed of having a powerful magical beast like a Velocidragon for his companion. In the eyes of many youths, Wharton was their role model.

Saber-Toothed Tigers were extremely fast. Even when travelling on the streets, it moved forward very rapidly and very nimbly.

"Here we are." Wharton saw that magnificent hotel from far away. This was the appointed meeting spot for him and the Seventh Princess. The receptionist for the hotel recognized Wharton as well, and immediately opened the door for Wharton to enter.

Leading the Saber-Toothed Tiger behind him, Wharton entered the hotel.

Wharton looked around the hotel, his gaze finally settling on the person he cared about the most. He immediately called out happily, "Nina." But just at this moment, Wharton suddenly frowned...because he also once again saw the person who irritated him.

"Wharton."

Nina had a head of full, lustrous blonde hair, and her pale face was as charming as ever. Her brilliant, shining eyes didn't have a single hint of impurity in them.

Nina ran over happily towards Wharton, who immediately stepped forward, taking Nina by the hand.

"That guy is bothering me again." Nina whispered to Wharton.

Wharton glanced at the distant man, saying in a low voice, "Nina, don't pay any attention to that guy." But just at that moment, the handsome young man walked over. With a calm laugh, he said, "Wharton, I really didn't expect to see you here. Why is it that you always appear wherever Nina is?"

"Shut your mouth, Lamonte [Lan'mo]." Wharton frowned. "Remember. Nina's name isn't for the likes of you to call out. And also. The question you asked me, I should be asking you. Why is it that wherever Nina is, you always appear?"

Lamonte glanced at Wharton, a smile that was not a smile on his face.

Although on the surface, he didn't seem to care much, in his heart, Lamonte really disliked this Wharton. After all, it was Wharton who had taken Nina away from him.

"Oh, a Saber-Toothed Tiger." Lamonte looked at Wharton's Saber-Toothed Tiger. Laughing, he said, "Wharton, any interest in letting my Blue-eyed Tiger Mastiff have a fight with your Saber-Toothed Tiger? I'll wager that my Blue-eyed Tiger Mastiff would definitely win."

Blue-eyed Tiger Mastiffs and Saber-Toothed Tigers were both magical beasts of the eighth rank.

However, there were differences in power amongst magical beasts of the eighth rank as well. For example, Goldmane Mastiffs and Blue-eyed Tiger Mastiffs were considered one of the top kinds of magical beasts of the eighth rank. Blue-eyed Tiger Mastiffs were particularly effective against tiger-type magical beasts.

“Not interested.” Wharton paid his suggestion no heed at all. Looking coldly at Lamonte, Wharton said, “Lamonte, if you really want to have a competition, I wouldn’t object to having a sparring match against you. As for having magical beasts, compete? Hmph.”

“A competition between men?”

Lamonte chuckled, then no longer said anything.

He, Lamonte, was an honorary disciple of the War God’s College, and he was a warrior of the ninth rank. He was indeed qualified to be arrogant. But right now, virtually all of the ancient clans of the imperial city knew that Wharton was of the Baruch clan, which in turn was the clan of the Dragonblood Warriors. And Wharton was clearly able to use battle-qi.

A scion of the Dragonblood Warrior clan who could use battle-qi was definitely capable of Dragonforming as well.

Lamonte knew very well that although Wharton appeared to be only a warrior of the eighth rank, when using that unique, special warblade of his to attack, he could fight on par with ordinary warriors of the ninth rank. But once Wharton transformed, he, Lamonte, wouldn’t be a match at all.

“Let’s leave.” Gently stroking the head of his Blue-eyed Tiger Mastiff, Lamonte chuckled lightly.

And then, Lamonte left along with his magical beast, just like that.

Nina and Wharton headed directly to a private deluxe room on the second room of the hotel. As for Nina’s female attendant, she stayed outside the room.

“You big lunk, tell me, what should we do about that Lamonte? He is so annoying.” Nina nestled in Wharton’s arms, asking in a soft voice.

‘Big lunk’. This was how Nina had addressed Wharton the first time they had met. Whenever they met in private, this was how Nina would address him.

“It is your own fault for being so charming, Nina.” Wharton grinned as he tweaked Nina’s nose. “Actually, I don’t care too much about that Lamonte fellow. The one I’m worried about is Caylan [Kai’lan].”

“Big brother Caylan?” Nina said with resignation, “I only think of him as a big brother, but he…sigh.”

Caylan was twenty three years old, but was already a magus of the seventh rank.

There were quite a few twenty three year old warriors of the seventh rank, but very few twenty three year old magi of the seventh rank. Moreover, Caylan had reached the seventh rank as a magus when he was twenty one years old.

If Linley hadn’t sculpted ‘Awakening From the Dream’, most likely it would’ve taken him until the age of twenty to reach the seventh rank.

In the imperial capital, Caylan was considered a genius magus. He had been childhood friends with Nina. And more importantly, Caylan’s father was the Left Premier of the Empire, an extremely powerful man. Caylan himself was, simply put, a very good person as well. It could be said that he was a nearly perfect individual.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 52, The Beirut Clan

“In terms of lineage as well as personality, Caylan is a fine man.” Wharton held Nina in his arms, speaking softly. “I’m afraid that your Imperial father will give your hand in marriage to Caylan.”

Nina nodded. “It is true that Imperial father values Caylan due to his high talent for magic. In the future, he has a high chance of becoming an Arch Magus of the ninth rank, and even has a chance to become a Saint-level Grand Magus. The Empire has many Saint-level experts, but most of them are Saint-level warriors. There are extremely few Saint-level Grand Magi.”

Wharton sensed that Caylan was a threat.

Although Lamonte belonged to the War God’s College, he was just an honorary disciple. In addition, his clan wasn’t particularly powerful either. He, Wharton, was a Dragonblood Warrior after all. As long as the Emperor wasn’t a fool, he would definitely select Wharton.

But if Caylan were to compete against Wharton, things would be different. His father was, after all, the powerful and influential Left Premier of the Empire.

“Nina.” Wharton became very solemn.

“Hrm?” Nestled in Wharton’s arms, Nina looked up at him.

“I am preparing to request an audience with His Imperial Majesty, and to personally ask for him to give me your hand in marriage.” Wharton said with a very solemn expression on his face.

Nina started, and then a look of wild joy appeared on her face.

“Truly?” Nina was very excited.

“Yes.” Wharton nodded. “Nina, before I do so, you can chat with your Imperial father and get a sense of which way the wind is blowing.”

Nina shook her head helplessly. “I thought I told you already. My Imperial father himself has yet to make up his mind. The only thing he says is, ‘no rush’, ‘no rush’....but my Imperial father does have a very favorable impression of you, and he values you as well. If you really were to ask for my hand, I think your chances would be very high.” Nina was very hopeful.

Only one of her older sister’s had married someone whom she loved. For the rest of Nina’s sisters, their marriages were marriages of political convenience, and not very happy ones.

Wharton nodded slightly.

“Don’t worry, Nina. I won’t let anyone take you from me.” Wharton tightly embraced Nina, who placed her head against Wharton’s massive, sturdy chest.

The Northwest Administrative Province. Cloudpeaks Village, outside the provincial capital. On the west side of Cloudpeaks Village, there was a forest. The already Dragonformed Linley was currently sparring with Bebe.

“Bebe, don’t force me.” Linley said helplessly as he wielded the adamantine heavy sword. “If you keep doing this to me, then I’ll be forced to use the Profound Truths of the Earth.”

“Heh heh, Boss, I know you care about me too much to do that to me.” Bebe was hovering in mid-air, speaking in human tongues.

Upon reaching the Saint-level, magical beasts could freely alter their size, and also speak in human tongues. But only a Deity-level magical beast could transform into a human shape.

In the entire Yulan continent, only the King of the Forest of Darkness and the King of the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts, these two powerful Deity-level experts, could transform into a human form.

As for Bebe, who knew how long it would be before he could reach such a level?

“You rascal.” Linley sighed. “I reached the Saint-level and finally caught up to you in terms of speed and defense. But you, you immediately entered the Saint-level as well. Your speed became even more ridiculous.”

But movement speed and attack speed remained two different concepts.

The speed of swinging a sword was far faster than movement speed. Although in terms of dodging and agility, Linley was no match for Bebe, his adamantine heavy sword was still able to block Bebe’s attacks. Thus, facing Bebe, Linley usually just stood there, using his sword to defend himself.

“Heh heh.” Bebe laughed proudly.

Actually, Linley’s Profound Truths of the Earth still posed a real threat to Bebe. After all, the Profound Truths of the Earth all but ignored external defenses, rendering Bebe’s powerful defense useless.

But how could Linley bear to use such a vicious attack against Bebe?

Thus, Bebe continuously teased and taunted Linley in their spars.

“Enough. My body has two claw marks on it now. Are you happy?” Linley laughed as he rubbed Bebe’s little head. “Let’s go back. It’s time to eat.”

As he spoke, Linley reverted to his human form, then put on a new set of clothes.

“The Boss is always the best.” Bebe flew to Linley’s shoulders and giggled.

In Linley’s current squad, if Linley were to avoid using the Profound Truths of the Earth, there was no one here who was a match for Bebe. Bebe was a truly powerful Saint-level magical beast, through and through.

“Bebe, what sort of magical beast are you, exactly?” Linley walked while chatting with Bebe.

“I really don’t know either.” Bebe rapidly shook his little head.

Linley suddenly remembered something, then looked towards Bebe in astonishment. “Bebe, do you remember back when we initiated our ‘bond of equals’, I asked you what your name was? At that time you said, ‘Bei’, ‘Bei’. You didn’t say whatever it was you wanted to say very clearly.”

Linley remembered that scene very clearly.

“Little Shadowmouse, what is your name?” Linley had mentally asked him.

The little Shadowmouse had said, somewhat excitedly, “Bei....bei....”

Linley had stared at the little Shadowmouse.

“What’s the little Shadowmouse saying?” Linley didn’t really understand.

His white beard flowing, Doehring Cowart had floated next to him and mentally said, “Linley, this little Shadowmouse is still an infant. He can’t form precise sounds yet. Even when engaging in mental communication with you, for now, he can only communicate simple intentions.”

Due to their spiritual link, Linley had been able to feel the little Shadowmouse’s excitement, but the little Shadowmouse simply couldn’t speak at all.

“Okay. You were saying ‘Bei’....’Bei’....then I’m going to call you ‘Bebe’. How’s that?” Linley had grinned as he watched the little Shadowmouse.

The little Shadowmouse had seemed to ponder for a while, and then had happily nodded.

And just like that, Linley had named him ‘Bebe’.

“Did I say that?”

Bebe was startled.

“Oh, right.” Bebe remembered. “I remember now. When I was very, very young, so young that I couldn’t even open my eyes, I heard a very close, very warm voice speak to me.”

Linley immediately looked at Bebe. He had never heard Bebe speak of this before.

It was normal for magical beasts to be unable to open their eyes soon after they were born. At that time, Bebe most likely had just been born not long ago. That was a very distant memory. If Linley hadn’t brought it up, Bebe wouldn’t have recalled it either.

“That voice told me that I belonged to some clan. It instructed me to hide in the back courtyard of your clan’s manor and to not run around. And then, the voice disappeared.” Bebe was very puzzled.

“The Bei-something clan?” Linley said questioningly.

“I don’t recall very well. It seems to have been Bei...Bei...oh!” Bebe’s little eyes lit up. “‘Beirut’ [Bei’lu’tē]. Right. It seems to have been ‘Beirut’. That voice told me that I was a member of the mighty Beirut clan. It told me not to run around, because it was dangerous outside. That’s why I stayed in your manor’s back courtyard the entire time, Boss, as I slowly grew up there.”

Linley now understood.

“The Beirut clan?” Linley was puzzled. “Magical beasts have clans?”

Bebe shook his head in confusion as well. “I don’t know either. I never met my parents after I was born. I just stayed at the back courtyard of your clan’s manor, and all I had to eat were those pieces of rubble.”

Linley firmly imprinted this name into his memory – the Beirut clan!

Linley was absolutely certain that he had never heard of any powerful clan in the Yulan continent named ‘Beirut’. But this clan was most likely a magical beast clan.

A magical beast clan?

Linley didn't know about it because he was not a magical beast.

But Bebe didn't know either, because he had no parents.

Ten more days passed for Linley within Cloudpeaks Village. Per Linley's agreement with McKenzie, all he had to do was make a single trip to visit the Jacques clan within thirty days.

"Big brother Linley, you have a letter." Jenne ran in excitedly from outside.

"Oh, it should be from the Dawson Conglomerate."

The Dawson Conglomerate sent a letter every month. Linley immediately walked out. There was a young man leading a horse outside. Upon seeing Linley, the young man immediately bowed and said courteously, "Lord Ley, here is your letter."

Linley accepted the letter and laughed. "Next month, there will be no need for you to come here."

The young man looked at Linley questioningly.

"By this time next month, I will no longer be here." Linley had made the decision long ago that in the next few days, he would head to the Jacques clan.

His wounds had healed long ago, and after Dragonforming, he was a Saint-level combatant. It was time to go visit his little brother.

It had been a long, long time since he had met with Wharton. In his heart, Linley had always missed this one and only sibling of his.

"Yes, Lord Ley." The young man said respectfully, and then he mounted his horse and left.

As for Linley, he opened the letter and read it. The letter had quite a good amount of general information regarding the current state of affairs for the Radiant Church and the Yulan continent as a whole. It also had some information about Reynolds, George, and Yale. At the bottom was information regarding Wharton.

"George is really formidable." Linley mentally sighed in praise.

With the support of the Walsh family, George had continued on his upward trajectory within the Yulan Empire. He himself was very talented as well, but more importantly...

The Third Prince of the Yulan Empire had successfully inherited the imperial throne, becoming the Emperor of the Yulan Empire.

Prior to the Third Prince assuming the position of Emperor, George had been on very close terms with him. The two of them were politically of one mind. Now that the Third Prince had succeeded his father as Emperor, George had become the youngest Grand Secretary in the Yulan Empire.

The entire Yulan Empire only had twelve Grand Secretaries. Each of them possessed extraordinary power and authority. What's more, George was also the Deputy for the Right Premier of the Yulan Empire.

"By comparison, Reynolds hasn't done as well as George." Linley chuckled, then he closely read the information regarding Wharton. Linley had a general idea of what Wharton was up to.

But upon reading the letter...

“What?!” Linley was shocked. “Wharton has asked the Emperor for the Seventh Princess’s hand in marriage?”

The Dawson Conglomerate had just transmitted this news to the provincial capital of Basil not long ago. After all, this event only happened a few days ago.

“The Emperor didn’t agree?”

Frowning, Linley continued to read. “Fortunately, although he didn’t agree, he didn’t refuse too harshly either.”

According to the letter, the Emperor was continuing to delay.

That Lamonte had gone long ago to ask the same question, and the Emperor hadn’t agreed then either. Now that Wharton had gone, the Emperor still declined to agree. What he said was, “Nina is still young. There is no rush.”

Nina was already twenty one years old. She wasn’t that young.

But Nina was both a magus and a warrior, and her affinity as a magus was to water magic, which was of exceeding benefit to one’s body. Nina’s lifespan would definitely be very long. It would be easy for her to live for three or four hundred years. Given this, it was true that she did not need to be in a rush to marry.

“One is the son of the Left Premier of the Empire, while the other is an honorary disciple of the War God’s College.” Linley could immediately tell who his younger brother’s greatest adversary was. It was the Left Premier’s son, that magus named Caylan.

“It seems as though the situation isn’t looking good.” Linley’s forehead was furrowed. A cold light flashed in his eyes. “No matter what, I can’t let Wharton walk the same road that I did. Tomorrow. Tomorrow, I’ll go pay a visit to the Jacques clan. After satisfying the agreement, we’ll head directly to the imperial capital.”

Linley had made his decision.

But right at that moment...

“Lord, Lord!” The familiar voice of Gates rang out. Gates was probably the most lively of the five brothers.

“Lord!” It wasn’t just Gates; the others were shouting as well.

Puzzled, Linley returned to the courtyard. As he did, Gates and the others immediately rushed to him, their faces filled with wild joy.

“All of you are so happy. What’s the good news?” Linley laughed.

“Second brother, second brother has already reached the ninth rank!” Gates was the first to speak.

“Ankh, our second brother, is at the Saint-level as well after transforming.” The third brother, Hazer, said with joy.

Linley was startled.

Of the five brothers, Barker was the first to reach the ninth rank. After he possessed the power of the Saint-level, the other four brothers, all at the peak of the eighth rank, continued to work hard. Unexpectedly, another one had reached the ninth rank so soon.

“Myself. Bebe. Barker. Ankh. All of a sudden, four of us have reached the Saint-level.” Linley had never heard of a clan possessing four Saint-level combatants. The scariest part of it was...the other three brothers could break through at any moment as well.

Linley had no idea, but he was grinning so widely that his lips threatened to split apart.

Perhaps the very next day, someone would come running over to tell him that another one of the five brothers had broken through. They would then have yet another Saint-level in their ranks.

Linley now felt all the more convinced that his decision to go rescue Barker and his brothers was an absolutely genius decision. By now, aside from Barker and Ankh, the other three brothers could be considered Saint-levels in the making.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 53, Guest

Living in the Northwest Administrative Province, it could be said that Linley had gotten everything he had desired. In the blink of an eye, he, Bebe, and the second brother, Ankh, had all reached the Saint-level of power. Their group now had four Saint-level experts. Even the three major trading unions or the four major assassin's guilds couldn't boast such a number!

This was an extremely powerful, hidden force.

Unfortunately, in the imperial capital, the opposite was true for Wharton.

In the spacious training area in the back part of the manor, Wharton was wildly training with his ancestral heirloom, the warblade 'Slaughterer'. Sweat was pouring down from every part of his body, but it seemed as though Wharton didn't feel tired at all, as he continued to train.

Watching quietly, Housekeeper Hiri shook his head to himself.

"Wharton is just like his father. He cares too much about love." Hiri had watched Hogg grow up, and knew how deep a love Hogg had felt for Linley's mother, Lina. When Lina had been abducted, Hogg had been in misery for over ten years. The only reason he had endured was because he had to raise Linley and Wharton.

As soon as Hogg felt that Linley and Wharton could grow up on their own, he threw away everything to investigate his wife's whereabouts. In the end, he paid for it with his life.

"Wharton is the same. His Imperial Majesty didn't totally cut off all his hopes. He only asked Wharton not to be in such a rush, and that there was no need for the Seventh Princess to marry so soon. But Wharton has become like this..." Hiri kept on sighing.

Housekeeper Hiri didn't know that it wasn't just Hogg and Wharton who were like this. Linley was the same as well.

"Groooowl."

After this bestial growl, Wharton slowly stopped brandishing the warblade in his hands. After having painstakingly trained for so many years, Wharton had already reached a very high level of proficiency with the warblade. The bestial roar that came out just now was one of the hallmarks of the warblade style he had developed.

"Grandpa Hiri." Wharton looked at Housekeeper Hiri, squeezing a smile onto his face.

After having unleashed all of his frustrations just now, Wharton felt a bit better inside.

"Wharton, don't be too sad. You and the Seventh Princess still have a chance." Hiri laughed. "I think the reason His Imperial Majesty has been delaying is because it is very hard for him to choose between you and Caylan."

Wharton nodded.

Wharton actually understood a great deal about the current Emperor.

He was an Emperor that highly valued human talent, and he was a fairly decisive man as well. But he had one flaw. That flaw was – bias! Extreme bias!

Everyone in the imperial capital knew this.

For example, twenty years ago, the Southeast Administrative Province's managing clan had made some mistakes. Since they didn't have the backing of a Saint-level expert, in the end, their clan was ransacked by the Emperor. At the time, many clans had desired to take over the Southeast Administrative Province. But in the end, the Emperor had actually given his one and only younger brother, Duke Julin [Yu'lin], authority over the Southeast Administrative Province.

Anyone the Emperor was close to, he tended to be biased towards.

Caylan's father, the Imperial Left Premier, Judd Darryl [Jia'de Da'li'er], had grown up alongside the Emperor. They were on very good terms with each other. After the Emperor took the throne, he naturally appointed Judd Darryl to a high rank, eventually appointing him the Imperial Left Premier. He possessed enormous power, and could be described to be second to only the Emperor himself.

The Emperor, being on such close terms with the Imperial Left Premier, naturally was very partial and protective towards Caylan as well.

In addition, Caylan was a very talented, worthy person. It would have been very natural for the Emperor to agree to Caylan's attempt to woo Nina. However, Wharton was also wooing Nina, and Nina herself liked Wharton. This made the Emperor hesitate.

Caylan and Wharton were both very talented.

He doted on Caylan, but he also doted on Nina.

Caylan's father was his dear friend and was one of the pillars of the Empire. But Wharton was a Dragonblood Warrior.

This was a very hard choice to make!

"I understand what His Imperial Majesty is thinking. For him to refuse my direct request to be allowed to wed Nina means that it will not be so easy for the two of us to be together." Wharton sighed.

"Wharton, you need to have some self-confidence." Housekeeper Hiri encouraged.

Wharton forced out a smile. "Grandpa Hiri, I know what the situation is. In the Empire, His Imperial Majesty's decree is absolute law. The only person he is afraid of is the War God himself. That's is why I originally took part in the competition to become an honorary disciple. I wanted to build a relationship with the War God. So long as the War God was willing to assist me, everything would have been set."

The War God. The true foundation and pillar of the O'Brien Empire.

A single word from the War God could make the Emperor abdicate without daring to say a word of complaint. After all the War God was the founding Emperor of the O'Brien Empire, and he was also a Deity-level expert who stood at the top of the entire Yulan continent.

"Slowly, slowly. Don't be in a rush." Housekeeper Hiri consoled.

"Lord Count, the Seventh Princess has arrived." An attendant walked into the training grounds and said respectfully.

“Nina came?” Wharton was very surprised.

Although the two were on very close terms, Nina rarely came to visit him at his manor. Wharton immediately took a quick rinse, changed into a fresh set of clothes, then went to the main hall to see Nina.

Within the main hall.

A look of happiness was on Nina’s face. The female attendant behind her laughed quietly. “Princess, what sort of expression do you think the Lord Count will have on his face when he hears this news?”

“What sort of expression the big lunk will have?” Nina pondered the question, her laughter becoming all the merrier.

As she thought and chatted, Nina suddenly heard footsteps. Turning, she saw a large, powerful figure walk in, as tall and strong as a wargod. Staring at this familiar figure, Nina felt a sweet feeling in her heart. In her heart, Wharton had already become her mental pillar of support.

“Nina, why have you come to my place? Aren’t you afraid your Imperial father will scold you?” Wharton laughed as he walked in.

Nina pouted. “He can scold me if he wants. I wanted to come.”

Seeing the adorable look on Nina’s face, Wharton felt a gentle, warm feeling in his heart. He sat next to Nina and held her hands. “Nina, judging from the look on your face, I think you are hiding something from me.”

Nina wrinkled her nose, saying delightedly, “I can’t hide anything from you. I want to tell you some good news.”

“Good news? What good news? Has your Imperial father changed his mind and decided to allow me to marry you?” Wharton said casually.

The Emperor’s words were as good as gold. How could he so casually take back what he had said?

“Of course not.” Nina’s smile was very bright.

“Then what is it?”

Nina’s expression grew solemn. “Two days ago, you spoke with my Imperial father, but he didn’t agree. I felt very unhappy, so I thought of something. I went directly to big brother Caylan.”

“You went to find Caylan?” Wharton’s eyebrows shot up. Caylan was his enemy in love. “What did you go find him for?”

Nina giggled. “Okay, stop guessing. I just went to have a good chat with big brother Caylan. I told him that the only thing I felt for him was the affection due an older brother. We grew up together, and he really was like an older brother to me. I asked big brother Caylan to help the two of us. I told big brother Caylan that if I were to leave you, Wharton, I wouldn’t be able to live.”

Wharton suddenly felt deeply moved.

“Big brother Caylan was quiet for a long time, but in the end, he agreed that he would speak to His Imperial Majesty, and that he would abandon his pursuit of me and allow us to be together.” Nina’s smile was incandescent.

“Caylan is giving up?” Wharton was shocked.

Wharton had been in the imperial capital for a long time now, and had interacted with Caylan several times. Wharton could clearly sense the love which Caylan felt towards Nina. He was totally, truly in love with her. And yet, Caylan had decided to give up. Wharton felt very moved, while at the same time, he began to somewhat admire Caylan.

“Big brother Caylan has given up, while the others aren’t much of a threat. As for that Lamonte, in my Imperial father’s heart, he can’t compare to you.” A very happy look was on Nina’s face. “Big lunk, there’s no one who can stop us from being together now.”

Excitement!

There was no way he could stop this sense of excitement and joy from swelling in his heart. The most troublesome, headache-inducing competitor facing him had voluntarily given up. This sort of sudden, unexpected joy made Wharton feel a little giddy and dizzy.

Staring at Nina’s incandescent smile, Wharton felt more moved than he ever had been.

“Right. No one will prevent us from being together.” Wharton held Nina tightly in his arms.

Linley, Bebe, Haeru, Rebecca, Leena, Jenne, Zassler, and Barker and his brothers left Cloudpeaks Village, making their way towards the provincial capital of Basil.

The provincial capital of Basil. The Jacques clan’s castle.

Linley’s group had arrived at the gates.

“Who comes before us?” The castle guards barked at them from far away. The Jacques clan were the local hegemony of the Northwest Administrative Province. Their headquarters wasn’t a place where just anyone could enter.

The fifth of the brothers, Gates, immediately shouted loudly, “Go inform McKenzie that our Lord Linley has arrived.”

“Who is making so much noise outside?!”

A familiar voice shouted. Linley carefully stared in the direction of that voice. Indeed, that gaudily dressed young man, Albert, came rushing out amidst a number of servants.

Seeing Linley’s group, the look on Albert’s face changed.

“You are called Ley, right? How dare you come to my house?” A vicious, sinister look was on Albert’s face. “I didn’t expect that those six people belonging to the Radiant Church wouldn’t be able to kill you. But my Jacques clan isn’t so easily bullied by the likes of you.”

At the same time, Albert also noticed that behind Linley, there was Jenne, as well as Rebecca and her sister.

Jenne’s complexion was as beautiful as a flower petal in a pool of water, while Rebecca and Leena possessed a certain mysterious grace that was extremely mesmerizing.

“How the hell did this guy get so many beautiful women to follow him?” Albert felt extremely aggrieved.

“How dare you come to cause trouble at the gates of the Jacques clan? Men! Seize them!” Albert immediately ordered loudly.

The surrounding guards all charged forward, but before Linley made a single move, Barker and his brothers charged forward.

“Spare their lives.” Linley said calmly.

“Got it.” Gates said excitedly.

“As long as they don’t die, right?” Barker’s eyes held a hint of glee as well. These five brothers had been famous in the Eighteen Northern Duchies as bloodthirsty warlords. When leading their armies, they had killed countless people.

These five enormous siblings were like war machines. They seized one guard after another, as easily as snatching up a chicken, and then casually tossed them like sandbags towards the castle gates. The force of these tosses by the Barker brothers was quite high. These warriors of the fifth and sixth ranks had their bones snapped as soon as they hit the ground.

“You...” Albert was so angry that his entire body was quivering. “You are too arrogant and wild. You dare act like this in front of the Jacques clan?”

“What is going on out here?”

An angry roar could be heard, as another group of people appeared from within the castle. The leader was a middle-aged man with a square face. Albert immediately bowed. “Father, these people are causing trouble at our gates, and they even injured our guards.”

“Oh?” This middle-aged man was the leader of the Jacques clan, Odin [Ao’deng] Jacques.

Odin Jacques stared coldly at Linley’s group.

“Haha, brother Linley, you’ve arrived!” A loud laugh could be heard as a blur suddenly descended from the heavens, appearing in front of the castle gates.

That stiff, ramrod straight back. That white-flecked hair.

Odin and Albert, upon seeing this man, immediately dropped all pretenses of arrogance and immediately bowed respectfully.

“Odin, what are you doing here?” McKenzie looked coldly at Odin.

Odin trembled, not daring to speak. He had heard how McKenzie had just said the words, ‘brother Linley’. He didn’t dare say a word.

“This has nothing to do with this Odin fellow. Only, there’s a small grudge between his son Albert and myself. Thus, he wanted to use the clan’s forces to resolve our private issues.” Linley said with a calm laugh.

“Grudge?” McKenzie nodded.

Casting a single cold glance at Albert, McKenzie turned to look at Odin. “Odin, have Albert go to the prefectural city of Deco to assist his uncle. The provincial capital of Basil is no longer an appropriate place for him to stay.”

Albert’s face instantly turned white.

The provincial capital of Basil was no longer a suitable place for him to stay? This was as good as saying that his position as heir to the clan leadership had just been stripped from him. Moreover, he was being

exiled to a prefectural city, and he wasn't even going to be the city governor; he was just going to assist his uncle. In the future, he wouldn't even be on Keane's level.

"Yes, grandfather." Odin didn't dare to hesitate in the slightest.

In the Northwest Administrative Province, McKenzie's stature was the same as the War God O'Brien's stature in the O'Brien Empire. Even if he wanted Odin to give up his position as clan leader, Odin wouldn't dare to voice a single word of complaint.

"Brother Linley, I am so very sorry. I was out for a stroll just now, and so I arrived here a bit late." McKenzie warmly welcomed Linley into his castle.

Smiling, Linley entered the castle alongside McKenzie, with Odin courteously following them from behind. As for the pale-faced Albert, no one paid him any more attention.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 54, Personal Disciple

The Jacques clan's castle was extremely large, but virtually everyone in the castle knew that the 'quiet park' that took up nearly a third of the castle was a restricted area.

Because that was where McKenzie lived. Aside from McKenzie and his wife, only three attendants as well as McKenzie's disciples were permitted to enter. Normally, even the clan leader or his sons had to be granted entry before entering.

The quiet park was extremely large, and more than half of it was taken up by trees and flowers. The buildings inside the park were both simple and unadorned. But despite that, it would be easy for over a hundred people to live within this place.

Linley's group had been invited to enter the quiet park.

A jade-haired, beautiful, virtuous looking woman who seemed to be in her thirties guided Linley's group through the park, helping arrange places for them to live.

"Bliss [Bi'li'si], prepare a banquet, just like last time when Haydson came to visit." McKenzie said to the beautiful attendant.

"Yes, milord."

The jade-haired woman was very shocked. McKenzie, when receiving guests, was very particular about how he treated them. Generally speaking, this high-class banquet which McKenzie was now instructing to hold was generally only for Saint-level combatants.

"Can this youngster be a Saint-level expert?" Bliss glanced at Linley, guessing silently.

McKenzie laughed towards Linley. "Linley, although you've been in my Northwest Administrative Province for quite some time, I'll wager you have yet to try some of the true delicacies of the Northwest Administrative Province."

"True delicacies?" Linley raised an eyebrow.

When he was staying in the hotels, the dishes Linley had ordered were all very famous. After all, for someone at Linley's level, money was of no concern.

"Of course, the provincial capital has many restaurants with fine dishes. But there are some special dishes which even those finest of restaurants only prepare a single portion of each week. Those special delicacies are something that you can't simply buy with money." McKenzie said proudly.

Throughout his life, McKenzie had only two hobbies; the first was training, and the second was sampling the various delicacies of the world.

McKenzie had even once said that if one didn't have the chance to eat rare foods, then one's life would have no flavor.

“Then today, I must have a good sampling of what you have to offer.” Linley chuckled.

Right now, only Linley and McKenzie were in the main hall, as well as Bebe, who was standing on Linley’s shoulders. As for Barker and his brothers, all of them had retired to their rooms.

“Hrm?” Seeing the Shadowmouse on Linley’s shoulders, McKenzie seemed to be slightly surprised. “Linley, I have the feeling that this magical beast of yours seems to be quite extraordinary. But he looks like a black Shadowmouse. This...” Black Shadowmice were the weakest type of Shadowmice. But McKenzie was certain that given Linley’s status, there was no way he would have such a weak magical beast companion.

Bebe had reached the Saint-level already.

Currently, however, Bebe was totally suppressing his aura. If a Saint-level combatant were to suppress their aura, unless the opponents were far stronger, they wouldn’t be able to sense the exact power.

“Bebe is a peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank.” Linley laughed.

On Linley’s shoulders, Bebe flashed his fangs disdainfully towards McKenzie. As Linley planned it, Bebe having reached the Saint-rank was one of his most valuable hidden trump cards.

Bebe was already extremely terrifying before reaching the Saint-rank. Now that he had reached the Saint-rank, if Linley didn’t use the Profound Truths of the Earth, he would be absolutely ravaged by Bebe in their sparring matches.

But amongst Saint-level experts, how many possessed such a strange attack as Linley’s Profound Truths of the Earth? Generally, Saint-level experts weren’t a match for Bebe at all.

“A black Shadowmouse which is a peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank?” McKenzie was still very surprised.

“Enough about that. McKenzie, in a few days, I plan to head off to the imperial capital. What do you think would be a good time for us to hold our sparring match?” Linley asked.

“Leaving so soon?” McKenzie was a bit disappointed. “I was hoping to celebrate with you for quite a while, brother Linley. That way, when we sparred together, we would learn more as well. But since you have business to attend to in the imperial capital, then...how about this? In three days, let’s have our sparring match in that small desolate mountain outside the city.”

“Works for me.” Linley nodded in agreement.

“Come, come take a look at my training yard.” McKenzie said warmly, and Linley followed McKenzie over to take a look.

While Linley was enjoying the warm hospitality of McKenzie, Wharton and Nina had left the imperial capital and were headed for the War God’s College.

The War God’s College was built on top of a tall mountain. The mountain was thus named, War God Mountain.

“It has already been over two hundred years since the last time the War God accepted a personal disciple. A few years ago, the Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier, refused the War God’s invitation. I didn’t expect that he would suddenly declare that he would accept another personal disciple.”

“If one day, I could become his personal disciple, even if it were just for a day, I would die a happy man.”

The road outside the imperial capital was filled with people, all chatting and calling out to each other. The War God's College accepting new honorary disciples was no longer an issue of major interest; accepting a new personal disciple, however, was an earth-shaking event. The importance of such an event was not one whit less than a new Emperor assuming the throne.

After all, in the past five thousand years, the War God O'Brien had only accepted a total of 20 or so personal disciples. Many of them were already deceased.

As for Emperors?

In the past five thousand years, there had been over a hundred of them.

Although in the hearts of the commoners, this was a huge affair, the War God's College method of carrying the recruiting of a personal disciple was very simple. When the time came, they would simply send out a public announcement of who the next personal disciple would be.

The designated time was today at noon.

And thus, early this morning, a large number of people had come to congregate outside War God Mountain. Wharton and Nina naturally went to watch this momentous event as well.

Within their carriage.

"Big lunk, who do you think will become the next personal disciple of the War God?" Nina asked. Even in the eyes of an imperial princess, the War God was high and far above them, someone who they could never approach. Since she was born, Nina had never seen the War God once.

In fact, not even the current reigning Emperor, Johann [Qiao'an], had ever met the War God.

But the personally taught disciples of the War God were qualified to meet him. From this, one could see the extremely elite status the War God's personally taught disciples held. In the past, when that Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier, had refused the enticing offer to become a personally taught disciple of the War God, everyone was shocked and filled with admiration.

"The personally taught disciple of the War God would definitely be a person of enormous talent. At the very least, he would be a warrior of the ninth rank, and one with the possibility of reaching the Saint-level." Wharton's words were based on historical precedent.

"However, there are too many experts of the ninth rank in the Empire, and talent level is difficult to determine as well. It is very hard to say who the War God will accept as his personal disciple."

Suddenly, the carriage came to a halt.

"Princess, we've already reached War God Mountain. There are too many people up ahead. The carriage can't pass through." The driver called out.

Wharton immediately helped Nina off the carriage.

"There are so many people here." Seeing the sea of people in front of them, Nina couldn't help but be afraid.

At the base of the cloud-topped War God Mountain, people were densely clustered everywhere. Earlier, carriages might have been able to advance, but now, none would be able to. The mountain roads were filled with people.

"Nina." Wharton smiled towards Nina.

“Groooooowl.” The Saber-Toothed Tiger, who had been following the carriage the entire time, leapt over. Wharton put Nina on top of it. “Have a good seat and take a firm grip. We’ll take a shortcut.”

Nina was both a warrior and a magus. Although she wasn’t very powerful, she was able to clutch quite tightly to the Saber-Toothed Tiger’s neck.

“Let’s go.” Nina was very excited.

The Saber-Toothed Tiger immediately soared into the air, with Wharton travelling at high speed by its side. Wharton and Nina didn’t take the main road; rather, they took some hard-to-traverse side roads from the back of the mountain.

Even the toughest, steepest of mountain paths were as easy for the Saber-Toothed Tiger to traverse as flat land. Wharton was extremely agile as well.

The two of them clambered up at high speed. On the way, they encountered quite a few powerful experts who were using the same method as they were. After all, if they had to squeeze in through the main road, who knew how long it would take?

“Here we are.” With a final leap, Wharton and the Saber-Toothed Tiger arrived at the main plaza.

“Wow. I’m so scared that my entire body is covered with sweat now.” Nina’s little face was very red. She hopped off the Saber-Toothed Tiger’s back.

The neat, flat stone plaza in front of them was extremely large. There already were over ten thousand people present, and yet it didn’t seem crowded at all. In fact, to the contrary; it seemed rather empty.

“Big lunk, did you know that this huge training school’s foundation was originally created by the War God himself? That year, he used one stroke of his sword to slice off the main peak of War God Mountain, then had the War God’s College built on the now-flat land.

Wharton was astonished at the War God’s power.

In truth, War God Mountain actually had several mountain peaks, with one being the primary peak. But the War God effortlessly chopped it off with one blow of his sword, creating a flat surface, upon which these various buildings of the War God’s College were erected, becoming the place where the honorary disciples of the War God’s College would stay.

According to legend, the personally taught disciples of the War God lived at another mountain peak.

“It isn’t time yet. Let’s have a rest.” Holding Nina’s hand, Wharton headed to a nearby stone bench and took a seat.

The plaza began to fill up with more and more people. Finally, the appointed time came.

On the tall dais in the front part of the plaza, there were a large number of people, all of whom were the honorary disciples of the War God’s College. Wharton’s ‘competitor’, Lamonte, was there as well.

“Look. A Saint-level expert.”

“Someone is flying over.”

Wharton and Nina all looked upward into the sky. They saw three human forms dressed in blue robes flash through the air, flying shoulder-to-shoulder towards the dais. Finally, they landed.

“Three Saint-level experts!” Everyone present felt their hearts tremble. Normally, even a single Saint-level expert was a rare sight, but now, three had appeared.

After landing, one of the three Saint-level experts, a middle-aged man who appeared to be the leader, said in a loud voice, “Everyone, today, we three fellow apprentices have come at our master’s instruction to announce who the 27th personal disciple will be.”

Everyone grew quiet.

“All three of them are the personal disciples of the War God.” Wharton suddenly felt as though he couldn’t breathe. The War God’s College was simply too powerful. All three of these personal disciples were Saint-level experts. No wonder the O’Brien Empire was named the most militarily mighty Empire in the world.

That middle-aged man continued, “The last time a personal disciple was accepted was in year 9723 of the Yulan calendar. This is now year 10008 of the Yulan calendar. 285 years have passed.”

Everyone below began to murmur. Such a long time had passed between accepting new disciples. 285 years. Many people didn’t even live that long.

“I announce that my master’s 27th personal disciple will be....Blumer Akerlund [Bu’lu’mo A’qi’lun]!”

Hearing this name, everyone in the plaza immediately let out a roar of joyous approval. At the same time, from within the group of honorary disciples who were standing on the dais, Blumer quietly walked out.

Blumer was rather skinny, and his eyes were slightly sunken. He gave the appearance of being a resolute, cold person.

“Respectful greetings to you, senior fellow apprentices.” Blumer bowed as he walked in front of those three men.

Those other three personal disciples of the War God all nodded slightly. Their leader, the middle-aged man, withdrew a scarlet interspatial ring from within his clothes.

Blumer knew that the emblem of one’s status as a personal disciple of the War God was always an interspatial ring, and a scarlet red one at that.

“So it’s him.”

Watching from below, Wharton shook his head slightly. Last time, when he had tried to join the ranks of the honorary disciples, the one who had won in the end was this Blumer.

Unexpectedly, after just a year had passed, Blumer had suddenly become the personal disciple of the War God!

Nina nodded as she said, “The seemingly common and ordinary Akerlund clan actually produced two geniuses in a row. The Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier, was an absolute genius who even the War God wished to take on as his disciple. And now, Olivier’s younger brother, Blumer, has himself become the personal disciple of the War God.”

However, Wharton’s heart was filled with self-confidence despite seeing Blumer’s success.

So what if Blumer was able to join the War God’s College? Wasn’t the point of it all to reach the Saint-level? He, Wharton, upon reaching the Saint-level as a Dragonblood Warrior, would definitely be a powerful expert amongst the Saint-levels.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 55, A Saint-Level Battle

While the citizens of the imperial capital were celebrating the 27th personal disciple the War God had chosen in five thousand years, in the far-off Northwest Administrative Province, Linley and the Saint-level expert, McKenzie, were currently chatting happily over wine. Tonight, they would prepare to do battle.

Tonight, the curved moon hung high in the sky, its faint silver glow covering the world, making it seem as though the entire world had been covered by a layer of gauze.

Atop the small desolate mountain outside the provincial capital of Basil, Linley and McKenzie were walking shoulder to shoulder, with Bebe seated on Linley's shoulder. The others did not come.

The only witness to this battle would be Bebe.

The small mountain was extremely desolate and depopulated. Aside from a few sparse trees, the mountain peak was empty and bare. Linley and McKenzie stood side by side on the top of the mountain. The mountain wind howled drearily, rustling their clothes.

Linley and McKenzie glanced at each other, each understanding the hidden meaning in the other's eyes.

Bebe very obediently hopped off from Linley's shoulders, and Linley removed his upper body clothes, storing them in his interspatial ring. He began to transform, and black scales quickly covered his entire body, while his forehead, back, elbows, and knees began to sprout sharp spikes. That iron-whip-like tail began to swing about behind him, and his eyes suddenly transformed into that merciless dark golden color. That faint layer of blue light appeared on his scales as well. As immense power began to radiate from Linley's body, dust and small rocks began to be caught up in the swirl of energy.

"Supreme Warriors live up to their name." McKenzie's eyes lit up.

"Whoosh!"

Simultaneously, Linley and McKenzie transformed into a pair of rainbows as they flew to the air above the small mountain. They stood there in mid-air, roughly a hundred meters from each other.

McKenzie flipped his hand, and an azure spear appeared within it. "In order to forge this spear, I had to spend twenty million gold coins to purchase all sorts of precious ores. After completing it, I named it 'Azureflame'."

Linley flipped his own hand, and the Bloodviolet flexible sword appeared within it.

"I acquired this sword from a very dangerous location in the Mountain Range of Magical Beasts. Its name is 'Bloodviolet.'"

With regards to his abilities in using Bloodviolet, Linley had reached the fourth level, 'Profound Truths of the Wind'. However, Linley had only reached the first, simplest stage of the 'Profound Truths of the Wind', which he had named 'Rippling Wind'.

But despite that, when combined with the unique properties of Bloodviolet, Linley still felt confident in his ability to deal with McKenzie.

“Being at the Saint-level makes me feel as though I am filled with boundless power.” Wielding the Bloodviolet Godsword in his hands, Linley felt extremely confident. “In the past, it was impossible for me to use Bloodviolet to harm a Saint-level combatant. It wasn’t that Bloodviolet was insufficiently sharp; it was that my own battle-qi and strength was far from being sufficient.”

How could the weapons used by most experts, in terms of sharpness, compare with this divine artifact, the Bloodviolet Godsword?

Bloodviolet was so sharp that if one didn’t use any battle-qi, just by virtue of its sharpness, it could pierce the defense of most magical beasts of the seventh rank. How many weapons could possibly compete with such terrifying sharpness?

Once it was matched with a Saint-level amount of battle-qi, its sharpness and power would reach an even more astonishing level.

“Then, let us begin!”

McKenzie’s body began to radiate a boundless desire for battle. Standing high up in the air, as the wind blew his long robes about, McKenzie’s body suddenly began to be covered with a layer of crackling flame, and the Azureflame spear in his hands began to emit flame as well.

His entire body seemed to have been covered by fire.

Clad in flame, and holding his spear at the ready, McKenzie looked like a god of battle.

“His battle-qi has actually reached such a level.” Linley’s eyes lit up.

“Boom!” Linley’s own battle-qi exploded as well, as that azure-black battle-qi totally covered Linley’s body, and also activated Bloodviolet. Those azure-black scales were totally covered by that azure-black battle-qi, making Linley look like a demon from the Infernal Realm.

A hint of a smile was on McKenzie’s lips.

Suddenly...

“Swish!”

Linley only saw a blur as McKenzie slashed his way through the air at him. The spear in McKenzie’s hands, burning with flame, seemed to have locked down all the surrounding space as it pierced towards Linley with tremendous, boundless power.

At this moment, it seemed as though the only thing which existed in this world was that spear.

“Clang!”

A strange, devilish purple light gently slashed open the locked space, and the tip of the sword clashed against the tip of the spear. As they did, Linley and McKenzie’s battle-qi exploded through their weapons at each other.

“Boooooom!”

A terrifying explosive sound blasted forth from between the two of them as the power released from this clash of two Saint-level experts burst forth in all directions. Even the boulders dotting the mountain beneath them began to crack apart from the released battle-qi.

The two separated at high speed after the clash.

“Hrm?” Linley glanced at McKenzie once. “His battle-qi is actually slightly more powerful than mine.” Dragonblood Warriors simply possessed too much natural talent. Even an early-stage Saint-level Dragonblood Warrior would only have just slightly less battle-qi than an ordinary mid-stage Saint-level combatant.

Of the Four Supreme Warriors, the Undying Warriors had the best defense, the Tigerstriped Warriors had the highest speed, the Violetflame Warriors had the fastest healing speed, but the Dragonblood Warriors had the best offense.

Dragonblood Warriors were nothing to joke about.

“Haha, wonderful. Take another attack from me!” McKenzie laughed loudly as he charged towards Linley at high speed again, transforming into three separate mirages as he did so.

“You want to compete in speed?”

Linley smirked.

Linley’s body blurred, then transformed into three separate mirages as he charged towards McKenzie as well, leaving a streak behind in the sky as he did so.

“Haaargh!”

The previously refined McKenzie was now extremely wild and unrestrained as his three mirages transformed into nine. But somehow, those nine shadow-McKenzie’s were all wielding the spear in their hands in a different manner.

“Bam!”

The nine mirages spun their spears in different ways, then thrust their spears at Linley.

Originally, Linley had only seen nine spears, but after those spears coiled about mysteriously, suddenly, it seemed as though the entire world was filled with countless spear-shadows.

An infinite number of spear-shadows, giving Linley no place to run.

“Haha...” Linley laughed loudly, while at the same time, he himself transformed into a whirlwind of action. In what seemed like the blink of an eye, Linley’s entire body had turned into a spinning tornado, and surrounding that spinning tornado were countless flashes of that devilish purple light.

Those countless spear-shadows were all blocked by those countless flashes of violet light.

McKenzie was stunned.

“Tornado Technique – Shatter!”

Linley roared loudly, and then he slammed towards McKenzie as though he were a giant warhammer. In the blink of an eye, that Bloodviolet sword in his hand seemed to have transformed into ten thousand different swords.

Those sword strikes all seemed so light and graceful, but when they collided against McKenzie’s spear, McKenzie felt as though they each had the power of a thunderbolt.

Wielding something light as though it were heavy!

“Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!”

Linley’s entire body had been transformed into a tornado, and McKenzie had a feeling as though the heavens themselves were aiding Linley. The strangest thing was, it seemed as though the sword in Linley’s hand could disappear then reappear at will.

Under these repeated assault, McKenzie was forced down to the ground from the sky.

“Bam!”

McKenzie landed heavily on the ground, and the earth around him cracked as dust swirled up everywhere. The flames atop of McKenzie’s body began to burn even hotter, and the warlike look in his eyes grew only more wild.

Linley landed heavily on the ground as well. Covered in azure-black battle-qi, the aura Linley gave off was totally opposite compared to McKenzie’s.

One was domineering and tyrannical. The other was dark and mysterious.

McKenzie lowered his head to glance at his chest.

Fresh blood oozed out from beneath his clothes, and then evaporated under the intense heat of the flames. But McKenzie’s bloodstained clothes indicated that he clearly had been wounded.

“Linley, I could understand your movements, but there was one thing I couldn’t understand. How could that Bloodviolet Godsword of yours fuse with the wind so well?” McKenzie was a very experienced Saint-level combatant.

The level of ‘impose’ was that of using the imposing force of the heavens and the earth.

But the amount of natural force which Linley had used to support his attack was truly frightening.

“Of course there is a limit to the amount of energy which the heavens and earth can loan you. As for the reason why you had such trouble defending...” Smiling, Linley lifted Bloodviolet into the air, and it suddenly, bizarrely, began to curve about every which way.

If you wanted a sword to be sufficiently hard and sharp, one of the pre-requisites for that was that the sword would not be able to be very flexible.

“This...this is a flexible sword?” McKenzie was very surprised.

Just then, when Linley exchanged blows with him, he had used Bloodviolet to attack in curving arcs. However, due to Linley’s usage of ‘impose’, the impression that McKenzie had gotten was that the sword would suddenly disappear, then appear from somewhere else.

This was another way one could use ‘impose’.

“Right. This is a flexible sword.” Linley said.

“But how can a flexible sword fight head-on against my Azureflame spear?” McKenzie was very shocked.

The reason why a flexible sword could straighten and be hard was because of battle-qi. But how could a weapon which relied on battle-qi to become straight be comparable to a weapon that was straight to begin with?

McKenzie's Azureflame spear was also a very precious spear.

"This is a divine artifact." Linley didn't hide anything.

"A divine artifact." McKenzie nodded in amazement, and then laughed loudly. "Wonderful. Linley, next I will use my ultimate attack. Be careful."

"I have a special attack that I haven't used either." Linley was very confident as well.

Right now, both men were on the ground, staring at each other.

"Haaaargh!"

McKenzie suddenly began to move. He lifted the spear in his hands, pointing it at the sky. Suddenly, with McKenzie as the focal point, an endless wave of flame began to spew out in every direction.

In the blink of an eye, within several hundred meters, everything had turned into a world of flame.

Linley was surrounded and caged in as well. His dark golden eyes watched emotionlessly. Within this World of Flames, McKenzie's image appeared everywhere, along with his spear.

Oppressive!

This World of Flames seemed to be suppressing Linley, and there was no 'imposing force' Linley could draw upon.

"Rumble..." One indistinct spear after another suddenly pierced through the air, thrusting towards Linley. Combined, they formed a seemingly very real fire dragon, which was coiling forth from the flames and roaring at Linley.

And at the same time...

Behind Linley as well, McKenzie bizarrely appeared out of nowhere as he thrust the spear in his hands toward Linley.

One in front, one from behind. Linley had nowhere to run.

"Rippling Wind!"

Linley began to move, and the Bloodviolet flexible sword in his hands suddenly transformed into countless vipers, colliding and striking against the various spear-shadows that were attacking from all around him. Each time his sword struck against a spear, there was a thunderous boom. That astonishingly powerful fire dragon seemed to have been surrounded and wrapped around by a large number of enormous pythons, and as the pythons constricted it, it exploded violently.

"Slash!" McKenzie's spear thrust out towards Linley from behind.

But that Bloodviolet flexible sword very nimbly and agilely curved backwards, blocking the spear. As the flexible sword bounced off the spear, Linley too immediately went flying backwards, moving farther away from McKenzie.

“Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!” “Bam!”

To his astonishment McKenzie had discovered that the area around Linley seemed to have suddenly given birth to wild gusts of wind, while the Bloodviolet sword in Linley’s hands seemed to have turned into a violet bolt of thunder, striking in every direction. In the blink of an eye, his World of Flames had been broken open.

Linley had already located McKenzie.

“Whoosh!” “Whoosh!” “Whoosh!” The Bloodviolet sword in Linley’s hands would appear and disappear at random. In McKenzie’s eyes, all he could see were countless sword tips stabbing towards him.

It was simply too fast. So fast that McKenzie wasn’t able to block them all, and his only option was to rouse his battle-qi to defend against it.

Countless sword tips pierced against his protective layer of battle-qi, and each blow contained an astonishing amount of force. With a sudden exploding sound, that layer of battle-qi blew apart, the force of it causing the earth to rumble, creating ten terrifyingly deep canyons in the ground. Dust flew everywhere.

After a long period of time, the dust finally settled down.

McKenzie’s clothes were totally ruined, unsightly beyond repair.

McKenzie glanced at Linley. Chuckling, he nodded. “I lose.”

But Linley stared suspiciously at McKenzie. “McKenzie, why were all the spear-shadows in your world of flames so weak and illusionary? My sword easily broke every one of them. If all of those attacks were real, I would have lost.”

Linley had already reached a very high level of understanding. He could tell that those spear-shadows were totally capable of becoming real attacks. In other words, those countless spear-shadows could all be real spears. It would have been very difficult for him to block them, if that were the case. But just then, he had easily broken every single spear-shadow.

“Haha, if all of them were real, then I would be a peak-stage Saint-level expert.” McKenzie laughed. “My current World of Flames can only reach this current level.”

“How is it that your Rippling Wind technique can be so fast? It was even more terrifying than what you were using when we started.” McKenzie asked in puzzlement.

Linley explained, “When we first started to fight, I was only borrowing the imposing force of the wind. As for the Rippling Wind technique, that was part of the insights I gained with regards to the Profound Truths of the Wind. The sword can become one with the wind, and wherever the wind is, the sword can appear.”

The Rippling Wind was indeed fast. Terrifyingly fast.

Linley was only able to develop this terrifying technique thanks to the unique properties of the Bloodviolet sword. Using Bloodviolet with this technique, it wouldn’t be hard for Linley to produce over ten million sword attacks in the blink of an eye.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 56, The Magicite Core

“Wherever the wind is, the sword can appear!”

Hearing these words, McKenzie was truly shocked. If he hadn’t personally sparred with Linley, upon hearing these words, McKenzie would have taken them to be an empty boast. But just then, he himself had sensed the terrifying speed of those sword attacks, which had reached a speed that was ten, no, a hundred times faster than his own.

There was no way for him to block them, and so he had to rely on his battle-qi to defend against it.

To be forced to such a state, McKenzie was thoroughly convinced of Linley’s superiority.

“Linley, you spoke of merging and becoming one with the wind. I...do not understand what you mean.” McKenzie said, frowning slightly.

Linley didn’t try to hide anything. Laughing, he said, “McKenzie, you must understand, the wind itself is invisible and formless, but it can be both as fast as the lightning, or utterly slow and calm. My ‘Profound Truths of the Wind’ is, in truth, based on that small amount of insight I have gained into the Laws of the Wind.”

“The Laws.” McKenzie’s eyes were filled with admiration. “The highest of truths.”

Every sort of elemental Law was extremely profound and mysterious. In truth, if one could master and understand a sufficiently large amount of one of these Laws, then one’s soul would totally merge with the ‘elemental world’ and crystallize into a divine spark, allowing one to reach the Deity-level.

As for Linley, he had just barely scratched the surface of these Laws.

Whether it was the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ or the ‘Profound Truths of the Wind’, Linley had only understood the smallest portion, like a single drop of water in an endless sea.

“By merging with the wind, my sword can appear wherever the wind is. But this sort of technique has a very high requirement with regards to the composition of the sword itself, because it requires the sword to almost instantly move from one place to another, causing the sword to come under enormous stress.” Linley smirked. “If there was no such requirement or drawback, then wouldn’t I be able to essentially teleport myself around by merging into the wind?”

Linley could indeed merge with the wind, but his body simply couldn’t handle the amount of speed and stress it would suffer from teleportation-like movement speeds.

“Haha, teleportation, eh? Even Deity-level combatants are not capable of such a thing.” McKenzie sighed.

No matter how powerful an expert was, even one such as the War God, they could at most move as fast as lightning. No one was capable of teleportation. Although people often talked about ‘teleportation’, that was just how the weak described the high speed movements of Saint-level experts who did battle.

Saint-level experts were simply too fast. Those ordinary people could only see that the Saint-level experts were sometimes here, and other times there. They took this to be teleportation.

In truth, there was no such thing as teleportation.

Even if there was, it wasn't something which the likes of the War God was capable of.

“McKenzie, what about that technique of yours? What was that all about? Just now, I couldn't sense you at all. I felt as though all of those countless spear-shadows surrounding me were real.” Linley stared at McKenzie questioningly as well.

When Saint-level experts sparred, it did indeed help them learn more and faster. Naturally, Linley wouldn't give up this opportunity by being shy about asking.

McKenzie laughed. “Actually, this sort of attack is a fairly common one. Generally speaking, most peak-stage Saint-level combatants use such an attack.”

“Oh?” Linley looked at McKenzie in astonishment.

“In the past, during the War God's battle with the High Priest, many experts witnessed the terrifying power of a Deity's “Godrealm”. Afterwards, many Saint-level combatants wanted to create an attack that could duplicate the effect of a Godrealm. In truth, that attack I used just now was a sort of ‘Pseudo-Realm’ attack.” McKenzie laughed at himself self-deprecatingly.

Linley continued to look at McKenzie.

What Linley wanted to know was the underlying principles behind this sort of attack.

“Actually, this sort of attack is extremely wasteful.” McKenzie said emotionally. “For example, I myself am a practitioner walking on the path of understanding the ‘Laws of Fire’.”

Every Saint-level practitioner had their own paths to understanding the various Laws. Only, they would all focus on different types of Laws.

“This attack, the ‘Pseudo-Realm’, basically forces one to blast out all of one's battle-qi, while at the same time summoning and igniting all of the surrounding area's fire elemental essence, causing everything within a hundred meters to turn into a sea of flame. Because my own battle-qi has merged with the fire elemental essence, this causes the entire sea of flame to be imprinted with my own aura, making you unable to detect where my true body is located.”

“However, my control is insufficient. I can only control my battle-qi to form a single true attack from the elemental essence. If I were able to control all the other spear-shadows and change them into real attacks, you would be in a great deal of trouble.” McKenzie laughed.

Linley was beginning to understand.

The underlying principles of this technique were quite simple. The difficulty lay in the control of elemental essence.

For example, ‘impose’ was just borrowing on the natural force of the heavens, but this ‘Pseudo-Realm’ was different. It required complete control! Generally speaking, it was impossible for a Saint-level to totally control all the elemental essence in a given area. This was something only a Deity-level expert could perform.

But Saint-level experts were very intelligent. By blasting out all of their of battle-qi, they allowed their battle-qi to merge with the elemental essence, then used it to control the elemental essence. Although it required them to use a large amount of effort and battle-qi, they were able to just barely create this ‘Pseudo-Realm’.

But despite that, its control over elemental essence was far inferior to that of the ‘Godrealm’ technique.

Linley had personally experienced how the King of Killers, Cesar, had used the power of his Godrealm to freeze both Linley as well as the peak-stage Saint-level expert, Stehle, in the blink of an eye, causing them both to be unable to move.

That sort of control over elemental essence was absolutely terrifying.

Compared to it, the ‘Pseudo-Realm’ was far weaker.

“This Pseudo-Realm does have its strong points. Although it consumes a huge amount of battle-qi, as long as one is at a high level of understanding, one can suddenly create ten million attacks out of nowhere. In addition, it also allows one to hide one’s body. It is more powerful than my own ‘Rippling Wind’ technique. The only weakness is that it uses up too much battle-qi, and is very wasteful.”

But then, Linley quickly shook his head.

“No. This is simply a clever little technique to mimic the Godrealm ability. Although it is a test of a person’s ability to control elemental essence, it has virtually nothing to do with a person’s actual level of understanding with regards to the Laws.” Linley believed that this was definitely a wrong path of training, not a correct path.

Earth, fire, wind, water. Each had its own Laws, such as the Laws of the Earth.

A complete, perfect set of elemental Laws was like a complete, perfectly constructed building. Every single brick in this building was akin to one of the profound mysteries of the Laws. Each Law contained within it countless numbers of profound mysteries.

Linley had gained insight into one particular mystery, and had developed his vibrational attack technique. This should be considered one of the higher class mysteries of the Laws of the Earth.

After this battle, both Linley as well as McKenzie were now in absolutely tattered clothes. But of course, only Linley’s pants were torn. The two changed their clothes, then smiling, left the mountain.

“Squeaaaak!” On Linley’s shoulders, Bebe delightedly squeaked at McKenzie, baring his fangs. It was as though Bebe was mocking McKenzie for losing.

“You little rascal. Jeeze...” McKenzie laughed involuntarily.

Linley laughed as well. Per Linley’s instructions, Bebe wasn’t giving any sign that he was at the Saint-level of power. Only when it was absolutely necessary would Linley reveal this trump card of his.

Under the moonlight, the two Saint-level experts chatted and laughed on the way back to the provincial capital of Basil.

The next morning, no matter how McKenzie tried to persuade him, Linley was still determined to head off to the imperial capital. Out of options, McKenzie personally sent them off, escorting them for over a hundred kilometers. By nightfall, the group arrived at a harbor at the Yulan river.

Early on, McKenzie had sent people to arrange a three-story boat for Linley at the harbor.

“Mr. McKenzie, there’s no need to escort us any further.”

By now, Linley was on extremely good terms with McKenzie. This McKenzie had escorted them for a hundred kilometers, all the way to the port. How could Linley not be grateful for McKenzie's kindness and courtesy?

"Brother Linley, I really hate the fact that I can't spend a few more months with you. However, you are in a rush to meet with your little brother, so I know it isn't appropriate for me to insist on you staying either." McKenzie said seriously. "Brother Linley, have a safe trip."

As McKenzie watched, Linley's group boarded this ship, and then, following the tides of the Yulan river, began to sail south.

The Yulan river was extremely wide, and the river waters were turgid.

This ship was much finer than the ship Linley had previously rented. In addition, the skills of its sailors were much higher as well. Although they went down the same general direction with the flow of the river, they were clearly moving much faster than before.

"This is the Yulan River? It really is huge." Barker and his brothers were standing at the railing, staring at the roiling river waves, their eyes shining.

Barker and his brothers came from the Eighteen Northern Duchies. They were used to seeing the land covered in snow and ice, but had never seen such an enormous river.

Rebecca and Leena were very excited as well, while Jenne chatted with them about the Yulan river.

Right now, Bebe and Haeru, the two magical beasts, were growling in conversation to each other.

Linley knew that ever since Bebe had reached the Saint-rank, Haeru had felt all the more ashamed in front of Bebe. After all, Haeru was a peak-stage magical beast of the ninth rank. He was used to being proud and arrogant. But now, he had suffered a severe mental blow due to Bebe.

"Haeru, come with me."

Linley glanced at Haeru, then headed directly to the second floor of the ship. Bebe and Haeru immediately followed after him. Right now, the second floor of the ship was fairly empty.

"Boss, why'd you have Haeru come over?" Bebe suddenly asked. While outsiders were present, Bebe didn't dare to speak, but now, with no one else present, Bebe was going to have a good, spoken chat. Bebe actually very much enjoyed speaking in human tongues.

Haeru's cold eyes stared questioningly at Linley.

He didn't know what his master, Linley, was planning to do.

"Haeru, in the past, didn't you and Bebe both want that darkness-type Saint-level magicite core?" Linley laughed.

Hearing these words, the intelligent Haeru instantly understood what Linley intended to do, and his eyes immediately lit up.

"Boss, you are giving him the Saint-level magicite core?" Bebe was able to guess it as well.

"What, are you opposed?" Linley looked at Bebe.

Bebe happily shook his little head, then looked at Haeru pityingly as he said mockingly, “Of course not. Although Haeru is sometimes a little bit cocky, he’s still a fine fellow. In the future, he’ll be following me, right? I’m a Saint-level magical beast. If my followers are too weak, that’ll be really embarrassing to me.”

Listening to Bebe’s words, Linley couldn’t control his laughter from coming out.

“Enough. Haeru, eat this Saint-level magicite core, then go to your room. I won’t let anyone disturb you.” With a flip of his hand, Linley retrieved that darkness-style Saint-level magicite core he had acquired so long ago.

Thinking back to the affairs of his youth, and that terrifying battle between the Armored Razorback Wyrms and the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear, Linley couldn’t help but secretly sigh.

Time had gone by. The current Linley most likely had the strength to fight head on against the Armored Razorback Wyrms or the Saint-level Violet Tattooed Bear. But back then, all he could do was hide.

“Bebe, you go to Haeru’s room as well. Help me keep an eye on him. If anything important and out of the ordinary happens when Haeru is trying to break through, immediately inform me.” Linley was concerned about any side effects Haeru might have from eating the Saint-level magicite core.

“Got it, Boss.” Bebe puffed out his chest, saluting.

Linley tossed the darkness-style Saint-level magicite to Haeru. Haeru opened his jaws, catching it in his mouth as he cast a grateful look at Linley. Given his level of intelligence, Haeru knew exactly how valuable a Saint-level magicite core was. What’s more, it wasn’t a guarantee that he would break through upon eating the Saint-level magicite core. He did have a chance of failure.

But Linley still had given him the Saint-level magicite core.

“I hope Haeru won’t disappoint me.” Watching Haeru and Bebe enter Haeru’s room, Linley secretly sighed. And then, he once more returned to the main deck, enjoying the view of the turbid waters of the Yulan river.

The ship continued to head south through the Yulan river at high speed as it had previously. As for the Blackcloud Panther, Haeru, he was beginning to charge towards the barrier between him and the Saint-level.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 57, Yet Another Saint-Level

A Saint-level magicite core contained the essence of a Saint-level magical beast's magical power. A Saint-level magicite core was something that was very hard to consume, and which would take a significant amount of time to do so. In the past, because Linley had the legendary 'Dragonblood Warrior bloodline', his special bloodline eventually dissolved and absorbed that ninth-rank magicite core of the Armored Razorback Wyrms.

But even after he had dissolved and absorbed that magicite core of the ninth rank, the residual energy of the core remained in Linley's body, alongside his Dragonblood. It hadn't been totally mastered and utilized by Linley.

"As the current continues to take us south, from here to the Southwest Administrative Province, we will have travelled more than three thousand kilometers. Such an enormous distance will take several days, even though we are following the current."

Looking at the roiling waves, Linley said to himself.

Who knows if a few days would be enough for Haeru to finish dissolving and absorbing that Saint-level magicite core. Linley himself didn't have any experience of course when it came to the subject of peak-stage magical beasts of the ninth rank absorbing magicite cores.

"Gates, why are you going back inside? The scenery around the Yulan river is pretty good." The third brother, Hazer, said in a loud voice.

Of the Barker brothers, four were standing in front of the railing, enjoying the beautiful sights of the Yulan river. Only Gates was heading back into the cabin.

"Big bro and second bro have already made their breakthroughs, third bro. You guys can watch, but I'm not in the mood. I don't want to waste time. I'll go back and train." Gates replied back loudly.

Hazer was caught off-guard.

Linley turned to stare at Gates in surprise. Right now, only two of the five had mastered the level of 'wielding something heavy as though it were light'. One was Barker, while the other was Gates. Gates was a very proud person. Linley knew this quite well.

"Gates is right." The fourth brother, Boone, nodded as well. "I will go train as well."

The third brother, Hazer, followed Boone into the cabin as well, leaving behind just Barker and Ankh. The two exchange glances, then began to laugh.

"Second bro, you have to work hard. If Gates makes a breakthrough, he'll be more powerful than you." Barker laughed as he spoke to Ankh.

Ankh nodded, drawing out the two giant long-handled greataxes on his back. "I'm going to the rear deck to train with my weapons."

"I'll go with you." Barker drew out his own long-handled greataxes as well.

The long-handled greataxes of Barker and his brothers were quite astonishing. These might be the heaviest weapons that existed in the modern world. 5300 pounds each, they were quite suited to the Undying Warriors, famed amongst the Supreme Warriors for their strength.

Zassler laughed as he stroked his white beard. “Those five brothers really have become quite hard working. They make this old man feel a bit ashamed.”

But despite saying that, Zassler continued to admire the local scenery.

At Zassler’s current level, what he needed was a flash of insight. Training alone wouldn’t provide that.

Smiling, Linley stood on the front of the ship. Slowly, Linley closed his eyes. The wind over the wide Yulan river was quite strong, and it buffeted Linley’s robes, causing Linley to sway ever so slightly.

Linley had totally become one with the wind, and could sense the movements of the wind elemental essence.

.....

Time flowed on like water. In the blink of an eye, four days had passed, and the ship had entered the domain of the Southwest Administrative Province. In two days or so, they should be able to reach the harbor they were aiming for.

“Big brother Linley is training?” Jenne said quietly.

Rebecca and Leena both shook her heads, indicating that they didn’t know.

Right now, it was late at night, but Linley continued to stand on the deck of the ship, his eyes closed. If someone thought Linley was asleep, though, they would have been wrong. Because every so often, a flash of violet light would pass by Linley’s body.

The difference was, this time, Linley wasn’t aiming for speed.

When he was training in the ‘Rippling Wind’ technique, Linley’s body was always surrounded by innumerable sword flashes. But right now, there was one just one violet flash at a time.

No one knew what Linley was training.

“Wielding something heavy as though it were light. Wielding something light as though it were heavy. It can be as fierce as the storm winds, or as gentle as the spring wind.” After having trained for so long, Linley finally was gaining some insight with regards to the second stage of the Profound Truths of the Wind.

Profound Truths of the Wind, stage one – Rippling Wind. This relied on pursuing speed to the highest levels.

In truth, once a technique’s speed reached a certain level, its attack power would also be extremely powerful. This was the reason why Linley could break through McKenzie’s defense in an instant.

But the second stage of the Profound Truths of the Wind which Linley was developing was a very unique type of attack.

When he struck out with his sword, sometimes the sword would flash like lightning, while other times it would be as heavy as a mountain. In truth, this sword attack was very fast, but it gave the impression of constantly rippling and fluctuating between being fast and being slow.

That was the intention of this technique.

“Profound Truths of the Wind, stage two – Tempos of the Wind.”

A smile was on Linley’s face. He slashed through the air with Bloodviolet, and when it did, he gave off two distinctly different impressions; one was that this attack was as fierce and explosive as the winds of a hurricane, while the other was that it was as gentle and calm as the spring wind which blew through the willows.

One technique with two opposing rhythms.

“These two totally opposite tempos, when merged together, can give birth to a blade made of air.” Linley continued to pursue his goal of using his sword to create the ‘Dimensional Edge’ type of attack.

This ‘Tempos of the Wind’ was a single-target attack.

Although its power was far inferior to the ‘Dimensional Edge’ spell, which was so terrifyingly powerful that it could cut through the walls of reality itself, the power of the ‘Tempo of the Wind’ had already exceeded that of the ‘Rippling Wind’ technique.

This was especially true in one-on-one combat.

“This second stage of the Profound Truths of the Wind, the Tempos of the Wind technique, should be capable of posing a threat to peak-stage Saint-level experts.” When Linley had sparred with McKenzie, he had gained a better understanding of what peak-stage Saint-level experts were like. “However, this ‘Tempos of the Wind’ technique is most likely one of the more basic mysteries of the Laws of the Wind that I have gained some insight onto.

Linley had to admit that the Tempos of the Wind was an extremely powerful technique.

But the ‘Tempos of the Wind’ could only be considered the most basic, rudimentary level of the ‘Dimensional Edge’ spell. It was still a material, physical attack, which the opponent could use battle-qi or armor to defend against.

But the resonating vibrations produced by the ‘Profound Truths of the Earth’ was clearly a higher level of attack. Those vibrations didn’t need to break the opponent’s armor; it could simply bypass it and attack the internals directly.

“To an ordinary Saint-level expert, using Bloodviolet should be enough.” Linley chuckled. “Unless, of course, I encounter some particularly powerful peak-stage Saint-level experts.”

Peak-stage Saint-level experts had varying levels of power as well.

For example, Stehle and the Holy Emperor were both peak-stage Saint-level experts, but Stehle was much weaker than the Holy Emperor. After all, the Holy Emperor trained in Oracular Magic.

Or for example, the Monolithic Sword Saint, Haydson, reputed to be the most powerful Saint-level in existence. To date, not a single expert had been able to overcome Haydson.

Of course, there were people who had never competed against Haydson, such as the Holy Emperor, or the Dark Patriarch. They didn’t dare compete against him, because their exalted statuses meant they simply couldn’t afford to lose. Unless they were totally certain of victory, they wouldn’t compete.

.....

The fifth day on the ship, at around noon, just as Linley and the others were eating lunch and chatting casually, suddenly....

“Boss, come quick!” Bebe’s urgent voice rang out in Linley’s mind.

Without hesitating slightly, Linley immediately began to run towards Haeru’s private room. “You guys, keep eating.” He instructed as he entered Haeru’s room.

Closing the door, Linley stared in astonishment.

“Rumble.” It seemed as though beneath the Blackcloud Panther’s skin, there were small mice running around, as his muscles and flesh constantly twitched. A black light surrounded his entire body. His eyes closed, the Blackcloud Panther constantly moaned in pain.

At the same time, the patterns on the Blackcloud Panther’s body were beginning to change as well. Sometimes his four limbs would turn snow white, while later they would turn totally black. Sometimes, his entire body would turn snow white....

Bizarre.

The most astonishing thing was that the Blackcloud Panther’s head was covered with two circulating gusts of blue and black energy.

“Boss, Haeru’s been like this for a while. I don’t know what to do either.” Bebe said with concern.

Linley looked at Haeru.

“Haeru.” Linley said to him mentally.

“Ma...master. I’m fine!” Haeru’s agonized voice rang out in Linley’s mind. Linley forced himself to suppress his anxiety, just watching and waiting.

Linley’s attention was focused on Haeru’s head. The most important part of a magical beast was their head; their magicite cores were there, after all.

In the air above and around the Blackcloud Panther’s head, those two streams of blue and black energy continued to spin about at high speed. Sometimes, the black energy would expand, but then a moment later, the amount of black energy would decrease, and the blue energy would increase in amount.

This repeated over and over!

And then, those two gusts of energy suddenly emitted a terrifying amount of force. Even Linley was shocked. If these two gusts of energy were to explode, most likely the entire boat would be transformed into rubble.

“Rumble.” Linley’s body immediately became covered with a layer of black scales. Without hesitating in the slightest, Linley immediately transformed into his Dragonform.

If he wasn’t in his Dragonblood Warrior form, if these two gusts of energy were to explode, Linley wouldn’t be able to take it. Linley’s remorseless, dark golden eyes stared at the Blackcloud Panther, his gaze as sharp as daggers.

Suddenly, those two gusts of blue and black energy returned to their earlier state of calmness as they directly entered the Blackcloud Panther’s skull. And then, the Blackcloud Panther’s body grew calm as well, and the patterns on his body stopped changing.

Linley let out his held breath.

Right now, the Blackcloud Panther's body was covered with beads of blood. That transformation just now had been a transformation in both physical and spiritual terms.

The Blackcloud Panther opened his eyes, staring with grateful joy at Linley.

"You succeeded?" A hint of a smile was on Linley's lips as he immediately returned to his human form. Only, his upper body clothes were ruined once again.

"Yes, Master." These growling, cold words in the human tongue came forth from the Blackcloud Panther's lips.

A faint gust of blue light appeared on the Blackcloud Panther's body, gently wiping off all of the beads of blood, restoring him once more to his normal, glossy black color.

"Not bad." Bebe floated over to the Blackcloud Panther, chortling. "It's a good thing that you didn't waste that Saint-level magicite core. Otherwise..."

Haeru looked away.

He could guess that if he had failed, Bebe would have given him a thorough beating.

"Enough. Let's all head out." Linley said after changing into another set of clothes.

Because of how his Dragonform transformation ruined his clothes, Linley had stored over a hundred set of clothes in his interspatial ring. But of course, to the current Linley, the amount of money it cost to buy clothes was a miniscule amount.

....

On the sixth morning they spent on the boat, the boat finally reached the harbor they were headed towards.

"We finally arrived." Rebecca, Leena, and Jenne, the three ladies, all stared excitedly with bright eyes. But just at this moment, from the rear deck, the sound of loud, explosive, excited laughter could be heard.

"Hrm?"

Linley, Zassler, and the others both turned to stare at the rear deck, where Barker and his brothers had been training this entire time.

"Barker, the five of you, hurry on over. We're about to reach the shore." Rebecca called out loudly.

"Coming, coming." Barker and his brothers walked over, laughing loudly. All of their eyes were on Linley, and there was a look of irrepressible joy on their faces.

Seeing that look on the faces of Barker and his brothers, Linley began to wonder. "These five brothers....can it be...can it be that yet another has broken through?"

Right now, of the five brothers, the oldest brother Barker and the second brother Ankh had reached the Saint-level in power. The others, in their human forms, were still only at the peak of the eighth rank.

"Lord." Barker's face was filled with excitement. "Gates has broken through as well!"

"Gates has broken through?"

Although he had predicted it, Linley still felt a surge of joy and excitement. He couldn't help but to turn and look at Gates. The usually loud and boisterous Gates was currently just scratching his head and beaming happily.

When they had left Basil and boarded the ship, Linley's forces consisted of four Saint-level combatants; Linley, Bebe, Barker, and Ankh. But upon landing, Linley's forces now consisted of six Saint-level experts.

Not a single Empire would dare be discourteous to such a terrifying force.

Taking a look behind at the Blackcloud Panther Haeru, then at the beaming Gates, Linley shouted with heroic gusto, "Haha, everyone, disembark! Let's go! We are heading to the imperial capital!"

"Let's go!" The five brothers also roared happily.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 58, Blumer's Request

Linley's group disembarked at the port, beginning to travel in the direction of the imperial capital. But as this port was in the central region of the Southwest Administrative Province, from there to the center of the O'Brien Administrative Province was a journey of four thousand kilometers after factoring in the curving roads.

Such a long distance would take at least ten days or half a month, even if one rode horses at full gallop the entire time.

On the road to the imperial capital of Channe, many people were talking about the rising star of the Empire; Blumer Akerlund.

"I hear that anyone who becomes the personal disciple of the War God has the possibility of becoming a Saint-level combatant eventually. Blumer is so lucky."

"What do you mean, 'has the possibility'? It is guaranteed."

In many of the common restaurants of the imperial capital, the drinking men would loudly chat about this subject. "That day, when it was announced that Blumer would be the personal disciple, I was there myself. Three of the personal disciples of the War God came, and all three were Saint-level experts."

"Not all of his students are necessarily at the Saint-level. The War God has accepted a total of twenty seven disciples, and the first one was accepted over five thousand years ago. He might have died by now. And there are the other personal disciples who have disappeared. Who knows if they all reached the Saint-level or not?" Someone else disputed.

"You don't believe in the power of the War God?"

"Of course I believe in the War God, but are his personal disciples necessarily that formidable?" The man pursed his lips. "Training requires natural talent. Look at the Prodigy Sword Saint, Olivier. He trained on his own and yet still became so powerful. How many of the disciples of the War God can compete with Olivier?"

"You aren't Olivier. You aren't qualified to speak poorly of Blumer. What's more, Lord Olivier and Lord Blumer are siblings, you know!"

That year, when Olivier had entered the Saint-level, he had easily defeated the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon. Thus, everyone believed that Olivier already possessed the power of a peak-stage Saint-level combatant.

Although Dillon himself was only a mid-stage Saint-level expert, if Olivier wasn't at the peak-stage, how could he so easily defeat Dillon?

"I hear that tomorrow, His Imperial Majesty is going to hold a personal audience with Blumer and confer upon him a title of nobility." Someone suddenly said.

"I've heard this as well. Tomorrow, many of the nobles of the imperial capital will be visiting the 'Martial Palace'.

The O'Brien Empire was an Empire which highly valued martial strength and valued their military. Since the founding Emperor of the Empire was the War God, it was natural that this was the case. Whenever the Emperor of the Empire wished to meet with his ministers, he would summon them to the Martial Palace.

The Martial Palace was named by the War God himself.

The next day.

Many nobles of the imperial capital got up very early this day. They dressed formally, then one after another, entered their carriages and headed towards the imperial palace. Today, the Emperor was going to confer a title of nobility on Blumer. This was a major affair.

Every single personal disciple of the War God would receive a title of nobility from the Empire.

For an Emperor to have the chance to do so even a single time was already quite lucky. After all, in the past five thousand years, there had been over a hundred Emperors, but only twenty seven personal disciples.

The rank of the title was already set. It was never as high as a 'Duke'; it was usually a 'Marquis'.

"After becoming the personal disciple of the War God, the noble rank conferred to Blumer is even higher than the one I received." Wharton casually thought to himself while riding in his carriage.

Personal disciples had a very exalted status. After all, anyone qualified to become a personal disciple was almost certainly capable of reaching the Saint-level.

What's more, they had the backing of the War God himself. Naturally, no one dared to offend him. And if you offended a single personal disciple, all the other personal disciples would possibly appear as well.

Upon reaching the palace gates, Wharton left his carriage and casually headed inside alongside the other nobles.

The Martial Palace usually only had around a hundred or so senior ministers present for morning court, but today was a special occasion. Many nobles who usually did not need to attend morning court were present, and thus a very high number of people were there.

Ordinary imperial nobles weren't even qualified to join this ceremony. Those who did participate were all people with power and authority. As for Wharton, he was a Count who had received his title of nobility from the Emperor himself, and thus he was qualified to participate.

The Martial Palace normally seemed very large and empty, but now that it was filled with over eight hundred nobles and senior ministers, it didn't seem very large at all. People were everywhere.

"Blumer, congratulations."

In the center of the palace, many people were surrounding Blumer, warmly congratulating him. Blumer's older brother was a Saint-level expert, while Blumer in the future would most likely become a Saint-level expert as well. Even the most powerful of clans wouldn't be so foolish as to anger a Saint-level expert.

Blumer quietly nodded in response to each of the nobles.

"Worldly power?" Blumer didn't care about it.

In his heart, the one he truly worshipped was his older brother, Olivier. Even the sword techniques that he utilized had been developed, then taught to him by Olivier.

Ever since he was young, Olivier had displayed astonishing amounts of talent, and he always protected Blumer as well. If anyone dared to mistreat Blumer, Olivier would definitely avenge his little brother.

“Big brother is training alone on that mountain peak. I wonder what level he has now reached.” Blumer silently wondered to himself.

Nearly nine years ago, his older brother had entered the Saint-level and easily defeated the Stellar Sword Saint, Dillon. At that time, there were some who already believed that Olivier possessed the power of a peak-stage Saint-level expert.

But Olivier didn't accept any gifts or titles. He just left by himself, continuing his training.

Three years ago, Olivier began training alone in a barren mountain outside the imperial capital. No one knew how powerful Olivier, who nine years ago already possessed the power of a peak-stage Saint-level, had now become.

“Perhaps one day, my older brother will reach the Deity-level as well.” In Blumer's heart, his older brother was an indisputable genius. There was nothing his older brother could not accomplish.

And indeed, this was the case.

Olivier was such a genius that even the War God had sighed in praise and wanted to accept as a disciple.

“His Imperial Majesty has arrived.” Many nobles noticed that the Emperor had arrived, and they immediately returned to their designated positions, forming neat rows as they paid their respects to the Emperor.

The Emperor of the O'Brien Empire, Johann O'Brien, was a fairly just Emperor, aside from that little problem of being biased.

Johann was fairly tall, standing 1.9 meters high. Even after becoming Emperor, he continued to train his battle-qi, causing his body to be powerful and sturdy. Dressed in his imperial robes, he sat on his imperial throne, looking down at everyone.

“Haha, where is Blumer?” Emperor Johann laughed as he looked down at his subjects. Today, Johann was extremely happy. Neither his father nor his grandfather had the opportunity to confer a rank of nobility on one of the personal disciples of the War God, but he did.

This sort of opportunity would happen only once in a lifetime.

With nearly eight hundred people standing before him, Johann couldn't immediately see where Blumer was. Blumer strode out from the crowd. Standing in the center of the palace, he bowed respectfully. “Blumer pays his respects to you, Imperial Majesty.”

Johann carefully inspected Blumer, then sighed in praise. “You are indeed incredible. Who would have expected that the Akerlund clan would suddenly produce two geniuses. You are not inferior to your elder brother at all.”

A hint of a smile was on Blumer's face.

Whenever others put him on the same level as his older brother, Blumer felt very proud.

“We are very happy that you are able to become the personal disciple of the War God. Today, We shall bequeath unto you the hereditary noble title of Marquis, a manor on Boulder Street, a hundred guards, a hundred maids, and a hundred thousand gold coins.” Johann said loudly.

Everyone stared jealously at Blumer.

Generally speaking, with each generation, the noble rank of Marquis would be lowered by one rank. If future descendants were incompetent, after a few generations, they would be commoners again and the noble rank would be lost.

But hereditary noble titles were different. They never dropped in rank. A hereditary rank of Marquis was far more important than even most ordinary Dukedoms. The Empire had many dukes, over a hundred. But very few of them were hereditary.

“Thank you, your Imperial Majesty.” Blumer bowed respectfully.

Johann nodded in satisfaction. Actually, this gift was already pre-determined. Every personal disciple of the War God was given a Marquisdom, and in each case it was a hereditary title.

Amidst the crowd of nobles and senior ministers, Wharton looked at Blumer, standing proudly in the center.

Previously, he had lost out to Blumer when the War God’s College was selecting honorary disciples. The gifts the Emperor had previously given Wharton was the hereditary title of Count, fifty guards, fifty maids, and fifty thousand gold coins. Clearly, Blumer’s gift was a level higher.

Wharton didn’t care too much about worldly goods.

But in his heart, Wharton had already considered Blumer as an opponent. “Although he is nearly ten years older than me, he’s only an ordinary person. I am a Dragonblood Warrior. These two cancel out. No matter what, I won’t let myself be weaker than him.” Wharton was extremely proud and stubborn.

But he hid these feelings in his heart.

“Blumer, today, We are in an extremely good mood. You are the first personal disciple that We have conferred a title of nobility on after We succeeded to the throne. Haha. Tell me, is there anything you desire? So long as it is reasonable, We will definitely agree.” Johann’s voice rang out in the Martial Palace.

Everyone’s gazes turned towards Blumer.

Actually, these words from Johann were just a form of courtesy. Historically speaking, the vast majority of personal disciples would say something like, “Thank you for your kindness, your Imperial Majesty.” They wouldn’t actually request anything.

“Your Imperial Majesty, your servant does indeed have a boon to request.” Blumer said.

Wharton stared at Blumer with a bit of surprise.

“Speak.” Johann magnanimously waved his hand.

Blumer bowed before speaking. “Your Imperial Majesty, your servant has seen the Seventh Princess, and as soon as I saw her, my heart was trapped by her. Your servant humbly begs that your Imperial Majesty give me the Seventh Princess’ hand in marriage.”

After he said this, everyone in the palace was stunned.

Asking to marry a princess!

This Blumer actually asked to marry a princess.

Hearing these words, Wharton felt his head grow dizzy. He shook his head, staring fixedly at Blumer in the center of the palace.

Blumer only stared quietly at the Emperor.

“Your servant humbly begs that your Imperial Majesty grant your servant’s request.” Blumer said again.

All the nearby nobles and senior ministers turned to look at Wharton. Who in the imperial capital didn’t know about Wharton and Nina? Just a while ago, Caylan, the son of the Imperial Left Premier, had personally sought out his Imperial Majesty to inform him that he would no longer pursue the Seventh Princess.

Many people believed that Wharton and Nina would definitely be a couple.

Even Emperor Johann had been planning to select an auspicious day to have Wharton and Nina marry. But this request by Blumer caused Johann to suddenly reconsider.

Johann glanced at Wharton, who stood out in the crowd. At 2.2 meters tall, he was the tallest of the local nobles and ministers.

Chuckling, Johann said, “Blumer, We truly desire to grant you this boon as well, but We must also ask Nina what she thinks. Don’t be impatient. Haha...”

“Yes, Your Imperial Majesty.” Blumer didn’t say anything else.

After court was adjourned, Wharton exchanged a quick stare with Blumer before the two left the Martial Palace. For Blumer to suddenly act in such way had indeed caught Wharton off guard.

The Emperor, Johann, was taking a stroll in his flower garden. He was in a wonderful mood.

“That Olivier cares nothing for fame or nobility. It is hard for me to recruit him. I was thinking about how to draw the Akerlund clan closer to me, but I didn’t expect...I didn’t expect...”

To Johann, Olivier, who had defeated the Stellar Sword Saint Dillon as soon as Olivier had entered the Saint-rank, was indeed a person worth building a relationship with.

And his younger brother was the personal disciple of the War God.

The Akerlund clan, in the future, would almost certainly possess two mighty Saint-level combatants.

“Olivier was so powerful upon entering the Saint-level. In the future, he’ll definitely be even more astonishing. At the same time, I can’t refuse to give face to the personal disciple of the War God.” Johann frowned. “But that Wharton...”

This was the reason why Johann hadn’t immediately agreed in the Martial Palace.

Wharton and Nina were truly in love with each other.

“Wharton only has the support of the decaying Dragonblood Warrior clan, while behind Blumer is the support of the War God and Olivier.”

Johann truly did give great weight to Blumer’s position as the personal disciple of the War God.

“I’ll keep delaying for now. No rush.” Johann decided to use the same strategy he had previously used against Wharton and Caylan when they were struggling over Nina. Only, in his heart, Johann was already inclined towards Blumer.

But what the nobles of the imperial capital, Channe, did not know was that at this very moment, Linley’s group of six Saint-level experts were hastening in the direction of the imperial capital.

Book 8, The Ten Thousand Kilometer Journey

– Chapter 59, The Brothers Meet

Several days had passed since Blumer received the title of Marquis.

“Milord.” The guards at the gate of the Count’s manor saluted respectfully.

Wharton seemed to have not noticed the guards at all. Not glancing at the guards in the slightest, he headed directly into his manor. The two guards looked at each other.

“The Lord Count has been really out of it the past few days. Just now, he was lost in his own world again.”

“Right. In the past, he would always smile at us and even greet us. From the looks of it, that Blumer’s request in the palace to be allowed to marry the princess had a major impact on the Lord Count.”

The news of Blumer requesting the princess’ hand in marriage had already spread throughout the capital.

Many people in the imperial capital knew about the affairs of Wharton, Seventh Princess Nina, and Blumer. In the main streets and the little alleyways, in the hotels and the restaurants, this topic could often be heard discussed.

“Wharton, what’s wrong?” A voice rang out.

Wharton turned to see who spoke to him. It was Hillman’s son, Nader. Shaking his head, Wharton let out a sigh. Nader understood. “The Seventh Princess didn’t show up?”

“Yeah.” Wharton nodded.

Wharton and the Seventh Princess often went on dates together, and the timing of these dates had become quite regular. But ever since Blumer had requested to marry Nina at the Martial Palace, Wharton had only met Nina a single time, the day after that event. The next three days, he hadn’t met Nina.

He wasn’t even able to see her. Naturally, Wharton felt very miserable.

Nader felt very aggrieved on Wharton’s behalf as well. Snorting, he said, “Blumer must be messed up in the head. He actually directly asked that the Seventh Princess be given to him in marriage. What the hell is wrong with him.”

“It’s pointless to talk about it right now.” Wharton shook his head.

Just at this moment...

“Lord Count, Lord Count.” A clear voice rang out from outside. Turning his head, Wharton saw that the speaker was the personal hand-servant of the Imperial Seventh Princess, Lucy [Lu’si].

“Let her in.” Wharton immediately said.

The guards let Lucy run in. Panting, Lucy charged straight towards Wharton. “Wharton, the Princess has been ordered to remain in the palace by his Imperial Majesty and is not to leave the palace. Even I had to

come up with some special ideas in order to leave. This is the letter that the Princess asked me to give you. Here, take it. I don't have any time, I have to go back now. If I go back late, it will be disastrous."

Lucy handed the letter to Wharton. Wharton stood there, stunned. Before he had a chance to even speak, Lucy ran away.

"What is his Imperial Majesty thinking?" Nader frowned, feeling rather angry.

Wharton immediately opened the envelope and withdrew the letter from it. Seeing the contents of the letter, Wharton felt a gush of warmth enter his heart, warming it.

Azure battle-qi exploded from Wharton's hands, reducing the letter to ash.

"Both a personal disciple of the War God, and the younger brother of Olivier. It seems his Imperial Majesty is favoring Blumer." Wharton saw things clearly.

If his Imperial Majesty didn't restrict Nina from coming out, Nina would go find Wharton, not Blumer.

This order clearly was meant to help Blumer.

Letting out a cold snort, Wharton felt helpless. Even Dragonformed, he would only be at the peak of the ninth rank. How could he cause any trouble or make any waves with that bit of power?

Many days later, outside the imperial capital.

One carriage, several horses, and a pure, pitch-black panther. Atop the panther was a young man dressed in a simple robe.

"Linley, look." Zassler, mounted on his horse, pointed at the distant, tall mountain. That mountain had multiple peaks. "That is the world-renowned War God Mountain. The War God's College is at the top of it."

"The War God's College?" Linley's eyes lit up.

The legendary and indisputably most powerful force within the Empire. The College founded by the War God who stood at the peak of the entire Yulan continent. Staring at the War God Mountain from afar, Linley couldn't help but sigh in admiration.

"War God..."

The War God O'Brien was simply too dazzling a figure. He had not only established the mighty O'Brien Empire, he had also fought the High Priest to a stalemate over the Yulan river. That battle had made him famous, guaranteeing that he would share the same exalted status as the High Priest.

After five thousand years, no one knew how powerful the War God, who had previously been on the same level as the High Priest, was now. But the only deity that was worshipped within the O'Brien Empire was the War God. From this, one could see how venerated the War God was.

Linley's heart was filled with a heroic urge. "There will come the day when I, too, will stand at the peak of the Yulan continent!"

Linley turned his head, no longer staring at War God Mountain. No matter how beautiful War God Mountain was, it belonged to the War God.

“The imperial capital of Channe.” Staring to the east, he could already see that enormous city, reputedly the largest in the entire continent. Channe was an enormous city. Only the imperial capital of the Yulan Empire could match it.

Channe’s architecture was simple and unadorned.

“The imperial capital of the most militarily powerful Empire in the continent. The place where experts reside. Channe.” A hint of a smile was on Linley’s lips. Underneath the dazzling sun, Linley and his team headed into Channe.

No major figures paid any special attention to this group of travelers.

But they didn’t know that these people would very soon cause earth-shaking disturbances within the O’Brien Empire.

“Haha, this really does live up to its reputation as the imperial capital of the O’Brien Empire. These streets are so wide.” Barker laughed loudly, and Linley laughed as well.

Linley’s team was walking in the center of one of the major thoroughfares of the imperial capital.

Barker and his brothers had already dismounted, as they put their weapons on their backs; those astonishing long-handled greataxes. On the way over, they had stored their long-handled greataxes within Linley’s interspatial ring. After all, the greataxes were simply too heavy; the horses couldn’t carry them.

“What muscular men.”

Many people in the imperial capital parted in front of this team. Barker and his brothers were simply too physically awe-inspiring. All of them were around 2.2 meters tall, had massive bear-like waists, and were so muscular they seemed inhuman. What’s more, on their backs they carried those enormous long-handled greataxes, which gleamed with a cold metal light.

Even if those long-handled greataxes were made solely from steel, they would weigh at least a thousand pounds. But from the coloration of those greataxes, clearly they were not ordinary weapons. Would someone who was weak dare wield such heavy weapons?

And that sleek, glossy black panther, who didn’t have any hint of discoloration whatsoever?

Nobody in the imperial capital had ever seen such a panther. This was because after the Blackcloud Panther had reached the Saint-level, it had the ability to easily change the colors of its fur.

“Boulder Street.” Linley knew where Wharton was staying, and everyone present hastened towards the East Channe’s Boulder Street.

“I wager that Lord Blumer will definitely be able to marry Princess Nina.”

Linley suddenly came to a halt, turning his head to stare at a nearby restaurant. Linley was frowning. “Nina? That Nina which Wharton likes? Wasn’t it someone called Caylan who was competing with Wharton? What does Blumer have to do with this?”

Linley knew who Blumer was.

When Wharton had taken part in the competition to become an honorary disciple, in the end, Blumer had been victorious.

“Nonsense. I’m willing to bet that Lord Wharton will be the one to marry Princess Nina. Princess Nina and Lord Wharton have been together for a long time now.”

“Hard to say. Look at Lord Blumer’s current status; he’s the War God’s personal disciple.”

“Lord?” Barker said in a quiet voice.

Linley stood there silently for a while.

Blumer was the younger brother of Olivier. He had actually become the personal disciple of the War God? And it seemed that he had asked the Emperor for Nina’s hand in marriage.

Barker and the others looked at Linley.

“Let’s go.” Linley said.

Linley’s group arrived at Boulder Street. Every single manor lining Boulder Street belonged to a noble clan, and thus Boulder Street was not very crowded.

Walking in the empty Boulder Street, Linley carefully inspected the signs on every single manor.

“Up ahead.” Linley’s eyes lit up.

The two guards who were engaged in idle conversation suddenly noticed Linley and the others walking over. They immediately became alert, especially after seeing the enormous bodies of Barker and his brothers.

“These guys are definitely as tall and as muscular as the Lord Count.” The two guards were somewhat shocked.

“Who are you?” One of the guards summoned all his courage, calling out bravely.

Gates was the first to reply loudly, “Is this Count Wharton’s residence?”

“Yes.” The guard nodded.

Hearing these words, Linley felt his heart tremble in excitement as it sped up. How many years had it been? Wharton had left when he was six years old. In a few days, exactly seventeen years would have gone by.

Seventeen years!

Smiling, Linley said, “Go deliver the message that his big brother, Linley, has arrived.” Hearing these words, those two guards were very surprised. Count Wharton’s older brother? They had never heard of such a person.

But these two guards had good judgment. They could immediately tell how formidable this group was. Without daring to say much else, one guard bowed. “Please wait here a moment. I’ll go make the report.”

Linley took a deep breath, letting himself calm down.

“Linley, this is your little brother’s residence?” Zassler walked over, laughing. “Looks like your little brother has done quite well for himself in the imperial capital.”

Linley couldn’t help but feel extremely proud as well.

Housekeeper Hiri and Hillman were currently chatting over some wine, but suddenly, the guard ran in at high speed. "Lord Hillman, a group of people have just arrived. Their leader claims he is Wharton's older brother, and that his name is Linley."

"Smash!" The winecup in Housekeeper Hiri's hands fell to the floor, smashing into pieces.

"Linley!"

Housekeeper Hiri and Hillman simultaneously rose to their feet. They stared at each other, wide-eyed and filled with shock and joy.

"Go, go, fast! Go inform the Lord Count!" Hiri immediately instructed.

And then, Hiri and Hillman both charged towards the outside of the manor at high speed. Seeing how Housekeeper Hiri had totally lost his usual bearing, the guard realized what a momentous affair this was, and he immediately ran to the training fields.

Soon, Hiri and Hillman arrived at the front courtyard. Arriving before the main gate, they actually slowed down as they looked forward carefully.

They saw five terrifyingly muscular men. Those long-handled greataxes on their backs alone made the two of them tremble. By the side of those five men, there was a skinny, skeletal old man whose shadowy green eyes were filled with a terrifying aura.

Besides the old man were three beautiful girls, pleasing to behold.

And at the very front...

"Linley!" Hillman was the first to speak. Housekeeper Hiri was still carefully inspecting Linley. After a while, he suddenly recognized who Linley was. He cried out in surprise and joy, "Young master Linley."

Linley, who was in the middle of a conversation with Zassler, turned his head.

Grandpa Hiri looked just as he had in Linley's memories, with that wine-reddened nose of his. And Uncle Hillman was there as well. Looking at them, Linley found that he was totally unable to suppress the excitement in his heart.

"Grandpa Hiri, Uncle Hillman." Linley rushed into the courtyard, his eyes beginning to turn moist.

Housekeeper Hiri walked to Linley's side, eyes red. "You grew up. You grew up. Young master Linley, you are taller than you were." It had been seventeen full years since Housekeeper Hiri had seen Linley.

When he had left with Wharton, Linley had only been ten years old.

"Grandpa Hiri, you look exactly the same." The joy in Linley's heart couldn't be expressed with mere words.

Looking at Linley, Hillman said in an extremely gratified voice, "Young master Linley, you've grown up. But you still look very similar to how you looked ten years ago."

Ten years ago, Linley was already 1.7 meters tall. His appearance hadn't changed much since then.

Suddenly, frantic footsteps could be heard.

Turning his head, Linley saw a tall, strong figure appear in the doorway, as though appearing from a dream. This person looked very similar to Linley himself. Linley had the feeling that this person was most likely his younger brother, Wharton.

Only, Wharton had left when he was just six years old. He had changed tremendously.

But Wharton only needed a moment before recognizing Linley. Linley still looked very much like he did in the past. Wharton's mouth hung open. His tears were already beginning to flow down his face. "Big bro..."

Linley slowly walked towards Wharton, his gaze totally locked on him.

"Big bro..." Wharton staggered forward two steps as well.

"Little Wharton. Is it really you?" Linley stared at Wharton. That chubby-faced kid of the past had turned into a 2.2 meter tall youngster.

"Big bro, it's me. It's me." At this moment, Wharton had totally forgotten about the issue with Nina. His heart was filled with boundless excitement. He was totally incapable of suppressing this excitement.

Linley reached out with trembling hands, resting them against Wharton's shoulders. He carefully looked at Wharton. His face blossomed into smiles, even as tears were shining in his eyes. In a quivering voice, Linley said, "Little Wharton, you've grown up."

That chubby face kid of his memories, who had always called out 'big brother', 'big brother' at him in a child-like voice, had already grown up.

"Big bro!" Wharton tightly embraced Linley in a massive hug. Having seen Wharton, Linley felt more excited than he had in a long time. Finally, he was no longer able to prevent his own tears from coming out, and they cascaded down his face.